



Yukon Legislative Assembly

Number 146

1st Session

35th Legislature

HANSARD

Tuesday, October 24, 2023 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2023 Fall Sitting

SPEAKER — Hon. Jeremy Harper, MLA, Mayo-Tatchun
DEPUTY SPEAKER and CHAIR OF COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE — Annie Blake, MLA, Vuntut Gwitchin
DEPUTY CHAIR OF COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE — Lane Tredger, MLA, Whitehorse Centre

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Hon. Jeanie McLean	Mountainview	Deputy Premier Minister of Education; Minister responsible for the Women and Gender Equity Directorate
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Hon. Tracy-Anne McPhee	Riverdale South	Minister of Health and Social Services; Justice
Hon. Richard Mostyn	Whitehorse West	Minister of Community Services; Minister responsible for the Workers' Safety and Compensation Board
Hon. John Streicker	Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes	Government House Leader Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources; Tourism and Culture; Minister responsible for the Yukon Development Corporation and the Yukon Energy Corporation; French Language Services Directorate
Hon. Sandy Silver	Klondike	Minister of Finance; Public Service Commission; Minister responsible for the Yukon Liquor Corporation and the Yukon Lottery Commission

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Yukon Party

Currie Dixon	Leader of the Official Opposition Copperbelt North	Scott Kent	Official Opposition House Leader Copperbelt South
Brad Cathers	Lake Laberge	Patti McLeod	Watson Lake
Yvonne Clarke	Porter Creek Centre	Geraldine Van Bibber	Porter Creek North
Wade Istchenko	Kluane	Stacey Hassard	Pelly-Nisutlin

THIRD PARTY

New Democratic Party

Kate White	Leader of the Third Party Takhini-Kopper King
Lane Tredger	Third Party House Leader Whitehorse Centre
Annie Blake	Vuntut Gwitchin

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Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Tuesday, October 24, 2023 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.
 We will proceed at this time with prayers.

Prayers

Withdrawal of motions

Speaker: The Chair wishes to inform the House of changes made to the Order Paper. The following motion has been removed from the Order Paper as it is now outdated: Motion No. 782, standing in the name of the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin.

DAILY ROUTINE

Speaker: We will proceed at this time with the Order Paper.

Introduction of visitors.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, we have a few folks here this afternoon for our tribute on Operation Nanook-Tatigiit. I would like the House to join me in welcoming: from the Canadian Armed Forces, Captain (Navy) Doug Layton, Deputy Commander of Joint Task Force North; Chief Warrant Officer Terrence Wolaniuk, Formation Sergeant Major; and Major Greg Theriau, who is the Yukon Detachment Commander.

We also have, from the Yukon government, Greg Blackjack, who is the director of the Emergency Measures Organization. Please join me in welcoming them.

Applause

Hon. Mr. Silver: I would like to ask my colleagues to help me in welcoming to the gallery today for the Breast Cancer Awareness Month tribute: Mary Ann Krockner, mammography technician; Kelly Cozens, manager of chemotherapy; and also Heather Milford, Yukon representative on the national breast cancer screening committee.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any tributes?

TRIBUTES

In recognition of Operation Nanook-Tatigiit

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I rise today to mark the beginning of Operation Nanook-Tatigiit. This is an inter-agency, territorial exercise organized by the Canadian Armed Forces. Operation Nanook-Tatigiit is happening in Whitehorse this week.

Yukon government is taking part alongside our partner agencies, including several municipal and First Nation governments, federal departments, Yukon utilities, the RCMP, and the Canadian Armed Forces. This year's tabletop exercise will simulate a prolonged winter power outage affecting Whitehorse and Carmacks. This is an important opportunity to

test emergency preparedness and coordination among all levels of government with the goal of improving our response during a real emergency. We learn a lot from tabletop exercises, without the disruption associated with actual emergency responses.

During this week, local authorities will work with Yukon and federal agencies on tasks such as evacuating people at risk, establishing reception centres, procuring and delivering fuel, and providing emergency social services and communications.

After a busy wildfire season, the Klondike spring floods, and power outages last winter, I know that many Yukoners are thinking about emergency preparedness. It is also top of mind for this government. We are proud to participate in Operation Nanook-Tatigiit to exercise our skills, demonstrate the lessons that we have learned as a government, and learn about what we can improve, because we can always improve, Mr. Speaker. When we prepare for likely risks such as a power outage, we will also be more prepared for unlikely or unusual hazards.

"Tatigiit" means "together" in Inuktitut and that's what emergency planning is all about — coming together to prepare for the worst. As climate disasters become more frequent and more extreme, we know that the Yukon is counting on us to pull together, plan, and prepare to improve emergency outcomes each year. The more we work together before an emergency happens, the better the outcomes will be for Yukon communities. Beyond this operation, I know that Yukon government emergency planners have already begun reaching out to Yukon communities to continue working with municipal and First Nation governments on hazard assessment and joint emergency planning. But, for this week, we welcome our partners to the Yukon, extend our thanks to all those who are taking part in this exercise, and I look forward to incorporating what we learn from Operation Nanook-Tatigiit into our emergency response procedures and plans.

Applause

Mr. Istchenko: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition and the Third Party, the NDP, to tribute Operation Nanook, the Canadian Armed Forces signature northern operation designed to exercise the defence of Canada and to ensure security for our northern regions.

These operations take place each year across the Yukon, the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and Labrador. It features up to four deployments a year and, of course, this year's tabletop Operation Nanook-Tatigiit exercise is taking place right now between Whitehorse and Carmacks. This exercise will involve response to a simulated winter storm causing a power outage in the territory.

These exercises are crucial to allow for training in challenging environments and improving coordination with all levels of government as well as responding effectively to safety and security issues in the north. One of the key components in Operation Nanook is a Canadian Rangers full-on Canadian Ranger Patrol Group. The ranger concept is important for the north and for the Canadian Armed Forces as it utilizes and develops the special skills of northerners — skills such as the ability to survive on the land and assist the military to operate

in harsh and extreme northern environments. Such local skills and knowledge are essential to the success of Operation Nanook.

Mr. Speaker, as many of you know, I am the Ranger patrol commander in my community and have participated in many multi-government and military operations across the north, including Operation Nanook. Getting all organizations working together is the key to the success.

I just came back from Ranger leadership in Yellowknife with all the other Ranger patrol commanders, and we debriefed on local emergencies that happened in the Northwest Territories this year due to wildfires. The evacuation of Yellowknife and Hay River highlighted how important the military members who are here today and our Rangers are to these northern communities.

Working with and assisting the local government agencies — municipal, territorial, and federal — is key to ensuring safe evacuations of these communities and it was key in Yellowknife and Hay River. Thank you to all who are here working on Operation Nanook-Tatigiit.

Applause

In recognition of Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Liberal government to ask my colleagues to join me in recognizing October as Breast Cancer Awareness Month. In Canada, breast cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer and the second leading cause of cancer death for women. One out of every eight women will develop breast cancer in their lifetime. With this statistic, many of us have been touched personally or know someone who has been diagnosed with this deadly cancer. That is why awareness is so important and early detection, treatment, and support are so imperative. The rate of successful treatment improves when breast cancer is detected and treated early. Awareness leads to noticing changes in your breasts and getting checked, which is critical. Awareness leads to better outcomes.

We have many initiatives in the territory that work to raise awareness of breast cancer and that support breast health here at home. Run for Mom is a brilliant local initiative to raise awareness and funds for breast health. It's held every Mother's Day in Whitehorse and other northern communities. Run for Mom has made significant contributions to the territory by continuously raising funds for breast health in Yukon for over 25 years. Dedicated organizers, volunteers, and participants deserve our thanks.

The Karen J. Wiederkehr Memorial Fund provides amazing support for people diagnosed with breast cancer since 2000, when she lost her battle at the age of 37. Thank you to everyone involved in fundraising and who are working to preserve Karen's memory.

The cancer care program at the Yukon Hospital Corporation is dedicated to supporting Yukoners through their unique cancer journey. Program staff provide devoted support to each and every patient. Although we don't have a big population here in the Yukon, we have huge hearts and passion.

I feel proud of our community dedication to raising awareness and supporting Yukoners who are impacted by breast cancer.

I encourage all Yukoners to get screened by your health care provider, to have routine mammography appointments, and to doing monthly self-exams. Research shows that there isn't a right or wrong way to do a self-exam; you just need to know the whole area of the breast tissue well enough to notice any changes. If you are over 40 years old, you can self-refer for a mammogram at Whitehorse General Hospital.

Please consider donating to our great local initiatives to support awareness, treatment, and support. Early detection can save a life.

Applause

Ms. McLeod: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Each October, we rise to talk about the symptoms, impact, statistics, survivors, and those we have lost to this horrible disease. Breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer in women, with one in eight being diagnosed in their lifetime and approximately 28,000 Canadians each year.

How does one end up with cancer? While it's safe to say that most people will never be able to pinpoint an exact cause of their cancer, it is known that breast cancer is always caused by damage to a cell's DNA, leading to cell mutations that grow from there. There are a number of factors that increase one's risk for breast cancer. Genetic risk factors include gender, age, race, family history and genetics, personal health history, reproductive history, certain genome changes, and having dense breast material.

Environmental risk factors include a lack of physical activity, poor diet, obesity, alcohol and cigarettes, or history of combined hormone replacement or radiation therapy. However, according to the National Breast Cancer Foundation, 60 to 70 percent of people with breast cancer have no connection to these risk factors at all and others with risk factors will never develop cancer. In other words, you never really know if and when it will affect you, your family member, your friend, your co-worker, or your neighbour, but there is hope as routine breast self-exams often catch breast cancer in its early stages and advances in early detection and treatment methods have significantly increased breast cancer survival rates in recent years.

So, please take time to check yourselves for changes in the breast. Talk to your physician or schedule a mammography for peace of mind. Screening mammograms can be ordered by a physician or by self-referral if you are over the age of 40.

Applause

MLA Tredger: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to recognize Breast Cancer Awareness Month. When I think of breast cancer, I think of how many people have been affected by it. I think of the people whose lives have been changed by a diagnosis. I think of all the people in their lives — their family, friends, co-workers, neighbours, and community members. I think of all the people we have lost and whom we miss so much. I am also grateful for everyone who provides support and care

to people who have breast cancer. I thank all the health care providers who go above and beyond for their patients. I thank all the groups who raise funds for the Yukoners cancer care fund and Karen's Room. I thank Run for Mom, Stix Together, Paddlers Abreast, and many more. I thank everyone who supports the fund to assist Yukoners living with cancer, and I thank everyone who looks out for their family, friends, and neighbours. Your actions provide compassion and care to people at a very difficult time. Thank you for everything that you do.

To all the people who are struggling right now, who are living with breast cancer, or who have been touched by breast cancer, we are thinking of you and we support you.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I have for tabling the Yukon Hospital Corporation annual report for 2022-23 and audited financial statements, which are tabled pursuant to section 13(3) of the *Hospital Act*.

Hon. Mr. Silver: I have a legislative return answering some questions from Committee of the Whole in the Public Service Commission.

Speaker: Are there any reports of committees?

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, the Members' Services Board has considered Bill No. 29, entitled *Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)*, and directed me to report the bill with amendment.

Speaker: Are there any further reports of committees?
Are there any petitions to be presented?
Are there any bills to be introduced?
Are there any notices of motions?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT the Members' Services Board's first report, presented to the House on October 24, 2023, reporting Bill No. 29, *Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)*, with amendment, be concurred in; and

THAT Bill No. 29, *Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)*, proceed to Third Reading.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House congratulates Gavin McKenna on being named to Team Canada's red roster for the 2023 World Under-17 Hockey Challenge.

Speaker: Is there a ministerial statement?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Minto mine closure and reclamation

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I would like to provide an update on our reclamation and closure activities at the Minto mine site. One of our next steps involves closing the underground mine workings. This work is underway and should be complete by early November. We are closely engaged with the Selkirk First Nation on this work.

We are applying lessons learned from the abandonment of the Wolverine mine in 2015 about taking required action and effective communication and decision-making. For example, we worked hard to mobilize a contractor within 24 hours of abandonment of the Minto site to ensure that water treatment and environmental protection activities at the site were maintained. We are actively advancing reclamation and closure planning and execution. Contractors on-site are in regular communication with Energy, Mines and Resources senior staff to inform effective, timely decision-making.

The Government of Yukon holds \$75.2 million in financial security and is accessing this money to cover the costs of reclaiming and closing the site. We hold financial security at all quartz mines in the Yukon to cover environmental liabilities and closure costs.

We have spent \$9.7 million to date on reclamation and closure contracts at Minto mine since the site was abandoned in May. Earlier this month, we received our first payment from the security bond holder. Last week, we were reimbursed in full for the expenses incurred during our first billing cycle — \$5.5 million. We have now signed \$20.7 million worth of contracts for reclamation and closure work at the mine site up to May 2024.

Now that the former mine owner, Minto Metals Corporation, is under receivership, there is a legal process in place to sell the company's assets and distribute any proceeds to creditors. Through the July 24 settlement order from the Supreme Court of British Columbia, Selkirk First Nation received \$1.7 million in royalties. There are no outstanding royalties owed. Former Minto mine workers are also now eligible to enrol in a federal government wage support program.

Mining continues to be an important part of the Yukon economy. In recent years, we have seen investments from major companies such as Rio Tinto, Teck, Mitsubishi Materials, Agnico Eagle, and Newmont.

Thanks to the Yukon's rich mineral resources, we are well positioned to provide critical minerals to support the ongoing clean energy transition. The Yukon has known deposits for nine critical minerals and documented occurrences for 16 critical minerals, including copper.

We are also developing new minerals legislation with First Nation governments. Our aim is to improve the management of the Yukon's mineral resources in a way that respects First Nation relationships with the land and supports a modern and sustainable mining industry. We know that there will be some key lessons learned from our work at Minto mine that can be applied to development of new minerals legislation.

The situation at Minto has been difficult for many. Mining remains critical for the Yukon and it is critical that we get mining right.

Mr. Kent: I appreciate the statement from the minister today regarding the Minto mine and what is happening on the site.

Much of this has been covered in recent media reports and at the briefing provided to opposition members by officials a couple of weeks ago. We also had the opportunity to ask a series of questions of the minister on this topic during Committee debate on Energy, Mines and Resources earlier in this Sitting.

There are, however, some follow-up questions we do have for the minister. We understand that there is a project execution plan that is being developed. Can the minister tell us when that plan will be complete? Will it include detailed cost estimates for the remaining reclamation and closure? Can the minister tell us how much money is still owed to private contractors and what portion of that is for Yukon-based companies?

After the initial direct-award contract was given to manage the site, the next phase of site management was also sole-sourced to a different contractor, so can the minister tell us the value of that contract and does it conclude in May 2024, as he mentioned in his statement?

And, of course, why was it necessary to sole-source that contract?

We also have some questions regarding the sale process. What role does YG have in the process and when do we expect it to be concluded?

Finally, I have some licensing questions for the minister. Can the minister confirm that Minto had all necessary permits and licences in place when they closed? Did they have a water licence in place and, if so, why is the Yukon government not using that licence to operate and is instead using emergency provisions in the *Waters Act*? Can the minister provide us with a copy of Minto's current licence?

I thank the minister and look forward to his responses to my questions.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for the update on the Minto mine saga, and I say "saga" because this really is a long, involved story and a series of missteps. From changes of ownership, shutdowns, reopenings, warnings, water licence infractions and non-compliance, the spilling of thousands of litres of diesel directly into the environment, and, most recently, a straight-up walking away from this site, quickly followed by a declaration of bankruptcy, the Minto story is like a bad soap opera with lots of plot twists. There are many lessons to learn from the legacies of both Faro and Wolverine, and it seems that maybe we have learned some but not all.

It's important to note that the Liberals were a majority government between November 2016 and the spring of 2021. In all that time, they never once started the decades-delayed process of developing successor resource legislation. That all started with the signing of the 2021 confidence and supply agreement with the Yukon NDP. So, it's a relief that following

a nearly 30-year wait, the new minerals legislation is on the horizon. This is great news, but there is a lesson that I'm concerned that the government missed with the closure of the Wolverine mine and that's the need to update the *Miners Lien Act*.

I appreciate that current ministers or my colleagues from the Yukon Party weren't sitting in that room with contractors as they were told that they would only be able to collect pennies on the dollar, but I was. Yukon Zinc agreed to pay 100 percent of the debt to all companies owed \$5,000 or less. Companies owed in excess of \$5,000 could opt to reduce their claim to \$5,000 and be paid the \$5,000 or elect to receive 11.5 cents on the dollar. In that meeting, the receiver said that companies owed \$43,500 or less would be best to take \$5,000 and companies owed more would be better off taking the 11.5 cents on the dollar.

As examples, one Yukon company lost nearly \$480,000, while another lost \$113,000, while two others were owed nearly \$3 million. There were approximately 52 Yukon companies owed a total of more than \$4.2 million when the mine owner walked away from Yukon Zinc. These numbers are just part of a saga of what is a really bad deal for Yukon companies, and this is all relevant because Yukon companies are, once again, left holding the bag.

My questions for the minister today are as follows: How many Yukon companies have filed liens against the Minto minerals site? How much money are they owed? And when will this government do a comprehensive review of the *Miners Lien Act*?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I thank the members opposite for their comments and questions. I am just going through some of them. First of all, because I already had the question on the creditors — that's how much money is owed and how many of them are Yukon companies — I had been preparing a legislative return, so I will happily get that for the members opposite.

With respect to how much money was in the contract for — I believe the question was around Boreal Engineering. That is for \$11.6 million and, yes, that takes us up to May 2024. The next question was around why we used sole-sourcing. The answer has been, in both instances, because we wanted to make sure, to protect the environment, that we acted quickly. In the first instance, it was within 24 hours, but in the next instance, it was to make sure that we continued to have Yukoners there ensuring that water treatment was happening so that we could start down the path of reclamation and closure.

I will look through Hansard to get at the other questions.

I will also just say that the path to successor legislation, I believe, began with the Premier when he was in the role of Energy, Mines and Resources and signed a memorandum of understanding with the chiefs of the Yukon to talk about how we would move down that together. Next was to bring forward the mineral development strategy. It came into place and had as one of its recommendations — we had a suite of recommendations. I believe that report has been tabled here and I think we have even had them here as witnesses in this

Assembly. But then we agreed that we would focus on new minerals legislation as one of the key elements of the mineral development strategy.

I agree that there are lessons to be learned, but I also want to note that, in this instance, we are moving on the right path, using the dollars that we collected for security to reclaim and close the mine in an environmentally responsible way. We will continue to do that work.

There were a couple of reasons that I stood today. First was to emphasize the reclamation and closure. Second was to emphasize that we have a timeline for the underground — that it will be closed by the end of November. Those were the updates — and that we had begun to collect on the security.

Those were the elements that I shared today as new information. I will fulfill my commitment to continue to inform Yukoners and members opposite on this important subject.

Speaker: This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Health care services in rural communities

Mr. Hassard: It's no secret that the Liberal government has been systematically cutting services in rural Yukon. We have seen cuts to services that affect things like solid-waste management, highway maintenance, and even rest stops in rural Yukon, but the worst of these reductions in services in rural Yukon has been in health care. The most recent health centre to face closure or a reduction in services has been in Faro.

I would like to start by asking the Minister of Health and Social Services: What are the steps that the government is taking to ensure that citizens in rural Yukon don't have to face service reductions like the one affecting the Faro Health Centre this week, and how is the minister working with the community of Faro to restore full access to health care services?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. I think that we should be clear that the reduction in service in Faro meant that the Faro Health Centre went from two nurses to one who would be there and have the health centre open. That is a reduction in service, but I know that the members opposite are fond of using the word "closure" all the time. The health centres have not been closing.

We are working to engage agency nursing groups when necessary and working to explore other opportunities to enhance nursing coverage to fill gaps when possible. When we are aware that there is going to be a gap, we communicate with the community and with the First Nation to let them know that this will be happening. We also work continuously up to and including the time of a gap to see if that can be filled. We recently were able to do that when there was going to be a shortage of service in Ross River, I believe. During that period of time, which others have been calling a lengthy period of time — any time with a service reduction is of concern to us and of interest as we go forward. We were able to fill that position for coverage during the middle of that —

Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Hassard: Mr. Speaker, I will just remind the minister that, in fact, health centres in rural Yukon have been closing — for up to a month, in fact. Throughout the pandemic, the Yukon government told Yukoners over and over that they should be going to yukon.ca to get the most recent and accurate public health information. Despite this, during the frequent health care closures and service reductions that have been implemented throughout rural Yukon over the past summer, the Yukon government has been relatively quiet in communicating about them. In fact, they usually only do a simple post on Facebook to inform Yukoners that they will need to make other arrangements for health care. I continue to hear from citizens in rural Yukon that these Facebook posts are not sufficient.

What is the Yukon government doing to improve communications with Yukoners about the ongoing and frequent closure of health centres in rural Yukon?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I appreciate that the member opposite is trying to write a story that is not exactly accurate. I appreciate the political point of view in trying to do so, but it is important that we speak to Yukoners with accurate information. Community nursing is currently experiencing a vacancy rate of approximately 19 percent for primary health care nurses, which is an improvement of approximately 29 percent since the fall of 2022.

We recognize that there is more work to be done to recruit new nurses to reduce service disruptions at community health centres and to support the existing staff to take time off that they need for their own health and well-being. Communication occurs in Facebook posts but also in direct communication with the health centres and direct communication, of course, with the community leaders, First Nation governments, and their health directors. We are committed to hearing feedback about all concerns from local representatives.

Mr. Hassard: Just for the minister's information, health centres have been closed and services have been reduced. That's a fact, Mr. Speaker.

In 2020, the Yukon government launched the *Aging in Place Action Plan* to encourage Yukoners living in rural communities to stay in their homes and communities longer. However, despite the promise made in that strategy, Yukoners who want to stay in their communities as they age are finding this increasingly challenging.

When the Yukon government cuts or reduces health care services in a community or closes a health centre altogether, it makes it even harder for seniors who want to stay in their communities. The unfortunate reality for seniors in many rural Yukon areas is that these service reductions make it very hard to age in place.

How can the minister tell rural Yukoners that they want them to stay in their homes and age in place while cutting these services?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I think that it should be made clear to Yukoners — and that is who I am speaking to today — that we are not cutting services to any community health centres. We do, on occasion, have service reductions — none of which we are happy about, none of which we are

supporting, all of which we are working diligently to fill at every occasion.

Community health centres are an integral part of each and every community. Our response to service disruptions includes the fact that we continue to be guided by the recommendations of *Putting People First*. We have integrated Emergency Medical Services into the Department of Health and Social Services, we are working to recruit more nurse practitioners across the Yukon, and we have increased access to preventive treatments. Emergency Medical Services expand their coverage to help mitigate any impacts of nursing staff shortages at community health centres, and we encourage Yukoners who need emergency service to contact 911 or to contact 811, a nurses' helpline for Yukon patients.

Question re: Rural emergency services

Mr. Istchenko: So, in response to the ongoing EMS reductions throughout rural Yukon this summer, the minister issued a statement on July 28 that said that part of the solution is to lean more on EMS in the communities. The statement said that during periods when health centres are closed or have reduced services, EMS staff will expand their services.

However, we continue to hear from Yukoners that EMS is facing challenges in the Yukon communities as well. This summer, several communities raised concerns over the gaps in local service and the lack of available ambulance or paramedic support.

Can the Minister of Health and Social Services tell Yukoners what changes have been made since EMS moved to her department that will actually help to ensure that rural communities are fully supported?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: On our side of the Legislature, in the government, we applaud the hard work of EMS, the volunteers, the dispatchers, and the folks who work for Yukon government.

Our government is committed to improving our health care system so that it is seamless, integrated, and person-centred — all of the goals set out in *Putting People First*. While EMS coverage has a goal of 100-percent coverage, gaps do sometimes occur. To offset coverage gaps, EMS has introduced a system where staff proactively travel to communities to cover when EMS personnel are not available in that community. There has always been a contingency plan in place to reposition people and ambulances. Calls go to nearby units. There is the opportunity to use medevac or to work with clients and patients to figure out alternative transport.

Mr. Istchenko: Mr. Speaker, I can sure tell you that we applaud those EMS staff too.

We have heard from several communities that the Yukon government has tried to fill the gaps in coverage for EMS by pulling staff from Yukon's medevac services to go into communities. Unfortunately, this means that medevac services can also be affected. When there are serious medical emergencies in a rural community, we often rely on medevac to transport patients to Whitehorse. We continue to hear that the wait times for medevac in rural Yukon have been growing and getting worse.

What is the minister doing to ensure that Yukoners in rural communities don't face unreasonable wait times for medevac flights?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that the members opposite — I appreciate them bringing forward the concerns that we hear also from communities and we are working diligently every day to reduce any gaps or impacts on Yukon communities with respect to health care, but this country, this territory, and the world, in fact, are in one of the greatest challenges facing it with respect to health care. The health care system and health and human resources concerns present the greatest challenges we have ever seen with respect to providing health care. The system is also in the middle of a shift to how health care is provided and how we will, as a society, respond to the issues that have been challenged.

In 2023-24, our government budgeted \$12.5 million for the Emergency Medical Services to help them deliver a wide scope of pre-hospital care, including medical interventions, treatments, and critical care. Sadly, the Yukon Party voted against those funds.

Mr. Istchenko: Throughout the summer, we have heard a lot about municipal governments having to step up to fill any EMS service gaps. This has been frustrating for many municipal fire fighters who have been called out on EMS calls. In September, a *Whitehorse Star* article reported that a Yukon government official stated that the MOUs were being negotiated with some municipalities that would help alleviate the problem with paramedic services in the communities.

Can the minister update us on the status of those MOUs? Which communities is the government negotiating with? What is the timeline for their conclusion? And, most importantly, how will these arrangements help to address gaps in rural EMS services?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, we are working with Emergency Medical Services — having them now be a part of the Department of Health and Social Services — to change the gaps in services that existed before. There is now seamless work together between EMS and our community health centres and the Whitehorse General Hospital and the community hospitals which will support better patient care.

EMS workers continue to be recruited, increasing the numbers of EMS staff across the territory. Over 200 team members work out of 17 ambulance stations in 17 communities. We are actively recruiting four emergency medical responders who operate on a part-time or on-call basis in the communities, as well as at least one critical care paramedic and at least one primary care paramedic who will be based here in Whitehorse. We look forward to the expansion and support of those services.

Question re: Teacher recruitment and retention

Ms. White: Yesterday, the Holy Family school council hosted a meeting where they called Selkirk Elementary and government officials about the critical shortage of teachers on call. These two councils echoed all of the concerns we've brought to this government and many more. We know that recruitment is an issue. Educators' salaries in the Yukon are not

competitive enough anymore to attract educators from outside the territory, and teacher-on-call salaries have stagnated for so long it's embarrassing. Educators are left struggling to make do while all trying to avoid burnout.

Here is what this government needs to do to provide schools with immediate relief: Step 1, streamline the long and complicated application process for teachers on call; step 2, offer concrete resources to school councils who want to recruit community members as teachers on call; and step 3, provide onboarding and actual training for new recruits.

There is more to do, but these steps will help to stabilize the situation until this government makes systemic changes. So, when will this government act?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. Certainly, effective teachers are one of the most important factors in our student success at school and we work very hard to attract and retain the best educators. I know that the member opposite is aware, of course, that there is a national labour shortage, much like what we are seeing with health care professionals, and a lot of factors that factor into this.

In terms of what we are doing as a department, we have taken many steps. I understand that the meeting went very well last night with the Holy Family school council. They were also joined by Selkirk, and we also had our senior officials there as well.

In the 2023 school year, we were able to take many strategic recruitment actions. We are continuing, of course, to build on that. I understand there were some very practical measures that were talked about last night and we will be acting on those as well, working closely in collaboration with the school communities.

We posted positions earlier this year to be more competitive with other jurisdictions, and there are many other steps that have been taken, which I will continue to discuss in the Assembly.

Ms. White: Well, that is a rather unfortunate answer because all of those suggestions came from that meeting last night. One way to solve the labour shortage is to pay people for the work that they do. Some teachers on call have told us that they haven't been paid since late August, so that is eight weeks or four paycheques.

Holy Family is regularly running their school at a 15- to 25-percent deficit of full-time teachers and educational assistants without enough teachers on call available to replace them. Administrators are teaching full time instead of doing their designated jobs, and they have students who can't attend school because there aren't enough educational assistants to go around. This crisis goes well beyond Holy Family; it's in every school across the territory. These shortages put a huge stress on everyone in the Yukon. Parents are concerned that the teacher shortage is hurting their children's education and their well-being.

Can the minister tell this House what concrete steps she is taking now to resolve the ongoing shortage of substitute teachers in every Yukon school?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, as of October 18, we have 151 registered teachers on call, most of them being in Whitehorse and 25 in rural communities. We have a number of pending applications that continue to be processed.

Of course, we are wanting to work closely with our school communities. We continue to evolve our recruitment efforts to attract candidates for teacher-on-call roles and to support staff in accepting assignments as they are available. We will be holding an information session at Employment Central on October 26, and we will follow with sessions in communities in the coming weeks. We have increased advertising on Facebook, in universities, on YuWIN, Employment Central, and other recruitment sites.

There were a lot of really great ideas discussed last night. That meeting was attended by our school council coordinator, our superintendent, the assistant deputy minister of schools, and our deputy minister. I can assure Yukoners that we are taking this matter very seriously and working closely with our school communities.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, I think that this bears repeating: Holy Family is regularly running their school at a 15- to 25-percent deficit of full-time teachers and educational assistants and they cannot get the TOCs. One school council has even written the minister to say — and I quote: “The snowball of stress is gaining speed and strength at unprecedented levels.”

This crisis has been getting worse for a long time now. The fact is that, in six years, the Liberals have failed to plug the holes that the Yukon Party sunk into our education system. The alarm has been ringing the whole time, but this government insists day after day, year after year, that everything is fine. This has to stop. The school community was very clear yesterday. This government's persistent refusal to acknowledge the issues that we bring forward is disrespectful to educators, parents, and students. The Liberals can't build respectful relationships with Yukon educators without first admitting that there is a problem.

When will this government respect the school communities and acknowledge that Yukon schools are in crisis?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I certainly know that there are many pressures in our education system; all of those pressures, we have been working to resolve. We have been actively working toward addressing the Auditor General report, which, really at the heart of it, has pointed to all of the pressures that were in our education system and that continue to be in our education system. We are working very hard to reshape education in our territory and that is what we are focused on.

We know that there are pressures in terms of recruitment and retention of teachers on call. We are working very closely with our school communities and we value all of our educators in the Yukon. We know that last night there were some really great ideas that were put forward, and we will work directly on them with the school communities and expand those ideas to other school communities throughout the Yukon.

Mr. Speaker, our government believes in education. We believe in treating our staff in the best possible way.

Speaker: Order, please.

Question re: Nurse recruitment and retention

Ms. Clarke: The Minister of Health and Social Services has told us that part of the solution to recruitment and retention of nurses is the bonus package that was provided to all Yukon government nurses last year. The intent of that package was retaining the nurses that we currently have; however, it was notable to many nurses that some of their colleagues were not able to access the bonus package because they were on maternity leave.

Why did the minister's retention bonus package not include nurses on maternity leave?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I think that is a question that we answered several times in the spring session. I guess we are cycling through those again, which is fine.

This was a very small number of nurses who were not eligible for the retention allowances as they were on maternity leave. It was authorized and regulated by the union collective agreement with respect to how those kinds of retention bonuses and allowances could be paid and, as a result, those matters were, as I understand, appealed to the Public Service Commission and were either resolved individually or are still through that process.

Ms. Clarke: Some nurses who received the benefit were unhappy to learn that their colleagues were not eligible for the bonuses because they are on maternity leave. Some of them think that this is discriminatory.

What impact does the minister expect to achieve by excluding nurses who work for the Government of Yukon and are perfectly qualified, but just happened to have had a baby at the wrong time?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, while I appreciate the repetition in the question, I am happy to also repeat the answer that the small number of nurses — my recollection is certainly less than 10 and I have four as a memory; I will try to confirm that number as we go forward.

The Yukon Employees' Union has a collective agreement that did speak to this particular issue, that talked about the ability to receive these kinds of retention allowances if you are on maternity leave. The decision was made as a result of the impact and the operation of that collective agreement.

Ms. Clarke: We have heard that because the minister was unwilling to make this retention bonus available to nurses who had recently had babies and were on maternity leave, that several grievances have been filed with the Public Service Commission.

Can the minister tell us how many nurses filed grievances with the Yukon government over the minister's decision to exclude nurses who are on maternity leave from receiving the retention bonus that was made available to every other nurse? What is the status of those grievances and when will they be resolved?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, I'm the Minister responsible for the Public Service Commission on this one.

As you know, we have been dealing with this issue with the Minister of Health and Social Services as well. I am just concurring with my colleague that the administration of these bonuses is consistent with the delivery of our compensation

allowances outlined in the collective agreement, not the way that the member opposite would categorize it as an individual minister trying their best to do something in any other different sense.

Like other compensation allowances for nurses, the recruitment and retention bonuses are based upon work performed. Employees who are on leave without pay but return during the specified period of time to qualify for any bonuses will receive a pro-rated amount for the time that they are actively performing in a position that requires a nursing designation. The minister is correct that there were four grievances associated with the bonuses and they will be managed through the normal grievance process.

Again, we have been working extremely diligently with all agencies involved here. The new bonus package serves to address the wage gap that we face with other Canadian jurisdictions and it is helping very much so with the ongoing recruitment and retention challenges that we have been speaking about here on the floor of the Legislative Assembly, which are happening right across the nation.

Question re: Bail system reform

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, we have heard from the RCMP and the public that the current bail system isn't working, and too often, repeat offenders are quickly released back on the streets where they re-offend. Part of the problem comes from changes that the Trudeau Liberal government made in Bill C-75 which led to all 13 premiers signing a letter urging the federal government to take "immediate action" to strengthen Canada's bail system. Federal action is needed, but so, too, is action by provinces and territories.

The National Police Federation which represents RCMP members said, "All levels of government, especially provinces, territories, need to work together to move towards a 21st century, evidence-based, intelligence-driven bail system."

Can the Minister of Justice tell us what this government has done to tighten up our system and keep repeat offenders off the streets?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I am going to assume that the member opposite, who I understand was a former Minister of Justice, understands that the bail reform issue is one that is the authority of the federal government, as is the *Criminal Code of Canada*, where those rules exist.

He is, however, correct that this is an issue that is being spoken about at the federal-provincial-territorial meetings that we have with the ministers of Justice and the ministers of Public Safety. In March 2023, we had such a meeting. It occurred to discuss the bail system in particular and its treatment of repeat violent offenders. The Government of Canada agreed to take action as soon as possible to strengthen public safety through amendments to the *Criminal Code*. On May 16, 2023, they tabled Bill C-48 to target repeat offenders and serious offences committed with firearms and other dangerous weapons.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, urgent action by the Trudeau Liberals to fix the problems they caused with Bill C-75 is needed, but the National Police Federation, the union representing RCMP members, in its recommendations entitled

“Smart Bail Initiatives” was very clear that provinces and territories also need to act. The NPF said: “All governments, in particular provincial and territorial governments, must be willing to commit to smarter bail reforms that go *beyond* legislative measures. Simple policy reforms and better resourcing could have a significant impact.”

They issued seven recommendations for implementing smart bail initiatives. All of those recommendations involve provincial and territorial governments and some clearly need to be led by provinces and territories. The recommendations include more resources to the collection and sharing of data and improving community bail enforcement monitoring.

The question is: What, if anything, is this government doing in response to the National Police Federation’s calls for action to fix the catch-and-release bail system?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Our government is, as are all governments in Canada, interested in a safe and effective bail system. To have such a thing requires post-collaboration across jurisdictions. Bill C-48, which is progressing through Parliament, was developed to address these concerns. At the highest level, a ministerial table was struck in order to have such conversations and dialogue between the provinces and territories, and then the federal government acted in bringing forward Bill C-48. It addresses concerns about public safety and increased confidence in the justice system of Canada that is related to repeat violent offending.

At a very recent meeting of the ministers of Justice, the ministers agreed to continue to work on the enhancements to bail data. We also agreed to monitor the effectiveness and the impacts of Bill C-48 after it becomes law.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, the National Police Federation said: “The current ‘catch and release’ system and lack of data-informed processes, supports and monitoring compromises public safety across Canada...” They also said: “Without serious wholesale reform jurisdictions across Canada are at risk of a bail system that is broken beyond repair.” They specifically call on provinces and territories to take action to implement smart bail initiatives. All seven of their calls to action involve action by the Yukon government.

The Premier has signed a joint letter to the Prime Minister about this, but the National Police Federation is clear that the provinces and territories also need to take action themselves to fix the system. Will the Minister of Justice commit to acting on all seven National Police Federation recommendations to fix the catch-and-release bail system, and will she provide us with a timeline for when her government will act on those recommendations and implement them?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I hope I have been clear, and if not, I am happy to repeat that this is a topic that is of the utmost concern to the ministers of Justice and the ministers of public safety across the country.

In March 2023, we held a specific meeting to discuss the bail system and, in particular, its treatment of repeat violent offenders. It is critical that the solutions to repeat violent offending and random violent acts lie in addressing the root causes of crime. This includes improving access to mental

health services, substance use treatment, and social supports such as supportive housing.

As the members opposite know, and I am certainly happy to repeat for Yukoners, these are all top priorities for our government: the declaration of the substance use health emergency, the implementation of the strategy going forward, the funding that we have put in place in the budget this year to support the substance use health emergency, to improve mental health services, to continue social supports and improve social housing. One great example might be Car 867 and the work being done by both departments of Health and Social Services and Justice.

Speaker: The time for Question Period has now elapsed.

Notice of opposition private members’ business

Mr. Kent: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.2(3), I would like to identify the items standing in the name of the Official Opposition to be called on Wednesday, October 25, 2023. They are Motion respecting Committee Reports No. 6, standing in the name of the Member for Lake Laberge, and Motion No. 793, standing in the name of the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin.

MLA Tredger: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 14.2(3), I would like to identify the items standing in the name of the Third Party to be called on Wednesday, October 25, 2023. They are Motion No. 798, standing in the name of the Member for Whitehorse Centre, and Motion No. 761, standing in the name of the Member for Whitehorse Centre.

Speaker: We will now proceed to Orders of the Day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request unanimous consent of the House to proceed at this time with debate on the motion for concurrence in the Members’ Services Board’s report on Bill No. 29, *Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)*, notwithstanding Standing Order 27(1) and Standing Order 13(3).

Unanimous consent to move, notwithstanding Standing Orders 27(1) and 13(3), Motion respecting Committee Reports No. 7

Speaker: The Government House Leader has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, requested the unanimous consent of the House to proceed at this time with debate on the motion for concurrence in the Members’ Services Board’s report on Bill No. 29, *Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)*, notwithstanding Standing Order 27(1) and Standing Order 13(3).

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: Unanimous consent has been granted.

MOTIONS RESPECTING COMMITTEE REPORTS

Motion respecting Committee Reports No. 7

Clerk: Motion respecting Committee Reports No. 7, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Streicker.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Government House Leader:

THAT the Members' Services Board's first report, presented to the House on October 24, 2023, reporting Bill No. 29, *Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)*, with amendment, be concurred in; and

THAT Bill No. 29, *Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)*, proceed to Third Reading.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I will be fairly brief.

First of all, it was my pleasure to take part in the Members' Services Board meeting this past Friday. What we were debating at that time was around Bill No. 29 at the Committee stage, and we agreed that we would bring a partial report of the minutes that referenced that debate here to the House so that all members could hear that or be part of that.

I would characterize the debate as being about how we could possibly move the electoral boundaries commission forward as quickly as possible. In doing so, one of the differences between how government had drafted the bill and when we were at that Committee stage was that we now knew what the end date was for this Sitting, which is November 23, and so we worked to count ahead a period of 60 days. That was what led to the amendment that we all agreed on to try to keep the process moving as quickly as possible.

I note that the reason we are bringing it here today is because this is when the Acting Chair tabled the report. I appreciate all members in helping us to bring this motion forward so that we can pass, I hope, the concurrence of the report and thus move the bill on to third reading.

Mr. Cathers: My colleagues and I will be supporting the motion. As we have been clear on the record, we support moving forward with having a new electoral boundaries commission as soon as possible. We recognize, as do others, that the current number of people in certain ridings is well out of line with the Canadian standard regarding the level above which the population of any riding should be in comparison to the average.

I will again note that this legislation should have gone through an all-party committee process in the first place, which would have saved the time and the debate that we have had so far in this House regarding the approach that the Liberal government chose to take.

Mr. Speaker, I do have to remind all Yukoners that the Liberals are the first government in Yukon history to amend elections legislation unilaterally and to seek to do it again, as they have with this legislation. It is simply a bad approach and departing from the long-standing practice of going through an all-party process where there is an attempt to reach consensus on any amendments dealing with our elections system is not a step in the right direction. I would remind all members that in 2015, for example — the last time elections legislation was

changed when the Yukon Party was in government — the draft of that legislation went to Members' Services Board before tabling. There was a walk-through of that legislation by all members, along with the assistance of the legislative drafter and the Chief Electoral Officer. All members indicated that they were comfortable with that legislation and, in fact, all three political party leaders signed off on a joint press release regarding the tabling of that legislation and supported that legislation when it came forward to the House. That is the type of approach that has been taken in the past and should be taken in the future.

The Liberals, unfortunately, have, on more than one occasion, chosen the unilateral path, which leads to needless conflict. I would remind members that they voted against the motion to send this bill to Members' Services Board. That being said, I would note that we will be supporting the motion here today.

I would also just note that, as the excerpts from the minutes of the meetings of Members' Services Board tabled today note, my colleague, the Leader of the Official Opposition, and I felt that an earlier date of December 15 would have been best through compromise. The date of January 22 was chosen. I would also note, though, that government could have provided more assistance during that process by giving the officials who were there at the briefing the ability to provide legal advice to the committee, which they unfortunately did not choose to authorize.

That being said, we will support this compromise amendment that has been arrived at, with the date of January 22, 2024, in this legislation. We do feel that it is important that the commission begin its work as quickly as possible in order to hear from Yukoners and to consult with them on any proposed changes of significance and ultimately table a final report in the Legislative Assembly.

Ms. White: Today, in speaking to the motion on the floor, there are a couple of factors — and I do appreciate that in Members' Services Board, we agreed to make the minutes public so that we could talk about it and it doesn't turn into a fight club, which you are not supposed to talk about.

It is important to note that on this floor, in this space, we have talked before about how we believe that the *Elections Act* should be at arm's length from government — arm's length from politicians or people who stand to benefit from changes to the *Elections Act*. Partially the desire to have it go to Members' Services Board is that Members' Services Board is an all-party committee that works pretty hard, I would say, to reach consensus or at least agreement on issues. So, when that came to Members' Services Board, we had the opportunity to be briefed by not only officials but to actually have the Chief Electoral Officer come and present and to actually answer questions that we had, based on a letter that he sent to both the chair and to the Premier. With those questions and the briefing from the officials, there were a couple of things that were brought to light.

Within the *Elections Act*, there are numerous references to "60 days" between one action and the other — 60 days — so

when we were talking about the day for the report to come forward, it is important to know that it is the absolutely last day that an order-in-council can come from the government to say that the committee will be struck. It is the last day. I would like to think that, at this point in time, all members in this House have talked about how important having a boundaries commission is, and how we all believe that it should happen sooner than later. My real belief is that all leaders, myself included, will submit the paper with our chosen person to go forward and that we will see this actually start sooner and see an order-in-council sooner than that date.

But I will say that the compromise was actually making sure that the date that has been chosen — January 22 — is 60 days after the final day of the Legislative Assembly. Not knowing when this was going to be passed, not wanting to cut those days short, it was chosen from the last possible date that it could go forward.

So, there are going to be, I'm sure, lots of conversations in the future about where the *Elections Act* should be. I believe that it should be at arm's length from government. I stand there and I will continue to say that, but I do think that this was an important process, taking it to Members' Services Board, made up with each political party and with the ability to have frank and honest conversations both with officials and then also together. What we see here is that working together. It is a minor change, but it is an important change because it was one that was decided by all three political parties together — and that ability after having both the briefing and questions answered.

The Yukon NDP will be supporting this motion and we look forward to getting started on the boundaries commission.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to the motion for concurrence in reporting Bill No. 29, *Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)*, with amendment to be concurred in and to proceed to third reading.

This bill amends the *Elections Act* to establish an electoral district boundaries commission in advance of the next scheduled territorial election on November 3, 2025.

Under the current legislation, the next commission would be appointed after the next general election in November 2025, and the proposed bill enables a commission to be appointed no later than January 31, 2024. However, on Monday, October 16, 2023, during second reading of the bill, the Leader of the NDP made a motion, which was carried, to refer the bill to Members' Services Board.

It is on the record that our government did not support that motion as we feel the bill put before the Legislative Assembly is a good piece of legislation, and we stand by that.

We felt, and still feel, the urgency to start this work and we are hearing it from across the floor. We have just lost over a week in progressing this bill and enabling the new electoral district boundaries commission to be established and start its work.

The Members' Services Board reviewed the bill, and the only amendment made is to the date of January 31, 2024, as

being the latest that a commission will be appointed — or proposed, as it now reads.

I hear the Member for Lake Laberge saying that we are wasting time, but I think putting our comments on the record is not wasting time.

I do want to commend the Member for Lake Laberge because, although there were some comments today about process and our Liberal government, I want to point out and put on the record that we commend the Member for Lake Laberge because he stood on his own, outside of all the Yukon Party members, with our government in 2018. He committed to the view that we had, and I think that this should be noted and I thank the Member for Lake Laberge for also aligning his beliefs and thoughts and vision with what we thought at that time. Though he critiqued some of our work, it will be noted historically that he stood alone with us and came to the same conclusion.

With that being said, our government is committed to seeing a commission struck to make recommendations on electoral boundaries.

The past week, in my opinion, did not enhance that process, but we did delay it a bit. Our government will support the amendment so that this important work can commence. This will allow for the tabling of the bill to amend the *Electoral District Boundaries Act* prior to the next territorial general election. Without this change, Yukoners will again be going to the polls with the same electoral boundaries in place from 2009 — almost a decade and a half ago.

There has been significant growth and movement in Yukon's population since the last adjustments to the electoral district boundaries were enacted in 2008. Yukoners, whether living in urban or rural settings or in new or existing neighbourhoods, need to know that their voice is being heard and their interests are being represented.

Let's not forget that the bill also corrects two technical deficiencies in the act: one regarding the time frames for appointing commissions, and the other for implementing amendments to electoral district boundaries. The bill ensures that such errors are corrected and that the legislation is in place to protect the principle that Yukon citizens have the fair and effective representation that they are entitled to.

I want to thank the officials at the Executive Council Office and the Department of Justice for their help in preparing the bill before us and also the electoral officer for the comments. Again, once we start this, we will have opportunity for input from all Yukoners and, as well, opportunity for input here for the Members of the Legislative Assembly.

We look forward to seeing this bill proceed through the Yukon Legislative Assembly and receive assent as quickly as possible.

Speaker: Are you prepared for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Division.

Division

Speaker: Division has been called.

Bells

Speaker: Mr. Clerk, please poll the House.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Agree.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Agree.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Agree.

Mr. Dixon: Agree.

Mr. Kent: Agree.

Ms. Clarke: Agree.

Mr. Cathers: Agree.

Ms. McLeod: Agree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Agree.

Mr. Hassard: Agree.

Mr. Istchenko: Agree.

Ms. White: Agree.

Ms. Blake: Agree.

MLA Tredger: Agree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 18 yeas, nil nays.

Speaker: The yeas have it.

I declare the motion carried.

Motion respecting Committee Reports No. 7 agreed to

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Speaker do now leave the Chair and that the House resolve into Committee of the Whole.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Government House Leader that the Speaker do now leave the Chair and that the House resolve into Committee of the Whole.

Motion agreed to

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Deputy Chair (MLA Tredger): Committee of the Whole will now come to order.

The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 54, Department of Tourism and Culture, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Deputy Chair: Committee of the Whole will recess for 15 minutes.

Recess

Deputy Chair: Committee of the Whole will now come to order.

Bill No. 211: Second Appropriation Act 2023-24 — continued

Deputy Chair: The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 54, Department of Tourism and Culture, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Department of Tourism and Culture

Deputy Chair: Is there any general debate?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: To begin with, I would like to welcome back officials: Deputy Minister Sierra Van der Meer and Assistant Deputy Minister of Corporate Services Kate Olynyk. Deputy Chair, I am rising today to introduce the first supplementary estimates for the Department of Tourism and Culture for the 2023-24 fiscal year. It has been a very busy year for the department and I would like to take just a moment to recognize a few highlights.

In terms of tourism, thanks in no small part to the Tourism branch's ongoing support of COVID recovery, through marketing, research, and advocacy — and also thanks to the industry itself — the Yukon's tourism sector continued its strong rebound in 2023 with further gains expected next year. The rugged apprentices program brought 49 volunteers to five different communities to complete infrastructure improvement projects while being immersed in local cultural experiences. The community tourism destination development fund distributed funding to facilitate sustainable and innovative destination development, including staff housing in Dawson City and enhanced infrastructure and tourism experiences across our Yukon communities.

There was one really big highlight that was pretty recent and that was the Tr'ondëk-Klondike receiving its long-awaited and well-deserved inscription as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the first cultural heritage site. The Yukon has Kluane as a geographic heritage site, but this is the first cultural heritage site north of 60 in Canada.

The Yukon also is marking its 125th anniversary since joining Confederation. That happened this summer, as you know, Deputy Chair. Together with the Yukon Historical and Museums Association, the department distributed about \$400,000 toward 67 projects across Yukon communities through its Yukon 125 fund.

There was a whole range of projects, including community barbecues, mural painting, special anniversary events, and the refurbishment of the iconic Yukon Theatre neon sign downtown.

The other thing I will mention is that the most recent 125 event I went to was TIA's 50th anniversary meetings last week. I thank the deputy minister for being there to talk with me to industry. This is just a quick sizzle reel of the important work and accomplishments of the passionate and dedicated group at Tourism and Culture.

The mandate of the Department of Tourism and Culture comprises of living histories, creative expression, and pride of place. Through its work, the Yukon's stunning, natural beauty, extraordinary heritage, and artistic talent is honoured, showcased, preserved, and enriched. By diversifying our economy, strengthening our communities, and reaffirming our commitment to reconciliation, tourism and our cultural assets keep our territory and its citizens healthy and prosperous.

I am privileged to represent the dedicated staff who bring their ingenuity and enthusiasm to this portfolio. I look forward

to answering any Tourism and Culture questions for the supplementary estimates. I look forward to the dialogue today.

Ms. Van Bibber: I also welcome the staff members to the House today.

I think, as the minister said, that the summer season was certainly better than we have seen in the past few years, with more visitors arriving. I know that the road traffic was definitely up, as were bus tours, and I noticed several caravans. This is getting to be good news for our second biggest industry in Yukon.

I am going to start with something that is kind of important to me and I think my caucus is getting tired of listening to me talk about it. As we all, as locals, travel up the highway — my particular hike is usually up the Klondike Highway — and we all have our habits and routines, the rest stops have been changing. Along the Klondike Highway, washroom facilities are closed and boarded up or taken away, as well as the garbage barrels. I understand now that these rest stops are managed by Tourism, so can the minister explain the decision to close several rest stops along the Klondike Highway? Can he also tell me if there was a cost-benefit analysis done and also whether the Department of Highways and Public Works was involved or if it was just strictly the Department of Tourism and Culture?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I hope to get this correct. I will check in with my colleague, the Minister of Highways and Public Works. I heard him speaking about this the other day in Committee of the Whole as well.

There is an overall approach to try to make sure that we have the right number of rest stops across the territory. Highways and Public Works is the lead in coordinating all of the departments involved. That includes, I believe, Tourism and Culture, Highways and Public Works, and Environment. There is some cost involved, but I think the bigger challenge is that there are almost always issues with rest stops. The issues are around making sure that they are well kept and going to be receptive for visitors or Yukoners when they arrive there. I know that, within my own riding, I get lots of calls. I'm sure that other members get lots of these calls all of the time about our outhouses, rest stops, and the condition of them.

Part of the work that Highways and Public Works is leading, working with Tourism and Culture and with Environment, will be looking at those rest stops and identify if there are ones that are very close to other rest stops and are not providing other services, such as being at points of interest or things like that, and making sure that we have a good distribution of rest stops across the territory. There have been a handful that have closed, which were Tourism and Culture's responsibility, but they were nearby other rest stops.

I know that the Minister of Highways and Public Works talked about the distances to the other stops in his remarks at Committee of the Whole, and I can look to echo those remarks, if needed, for the member opposite.

Ms. Van Bibber: It would seem that if it were at a point of interest, that would be where we would keep facilities because you are asking people to stop and take pictures and be part of the area.

As numbers are going down, I am hoping that whoever is responsible — going back to “they are a problem” — that now an effort will be made to clean them a little more often and be on top of that.

The Department of Tourism and Culture, as you mentioned, is intertwined with Highways and Public Works and with Environment. Highway maintenance was a topic of many discussions with many people this summer on how it was difficult to navigate anywhere without damage to vehicles. If it's happening to locals, I am sure it is happening to our visitors as well.

What is being done, working with Highways and Public Works, to identify the problem areas? How can the Department of Tourism and Culture help in mitigating some of the potholes and fixing things earlier in the season rather than waiting until August or September?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: A couple of points — first of all, I want to acknowledge all of the people who clean those outhouses and those facilities. Can I just give a shout-out to them on behalf of all members of this Assembly? I know it's not glamorous work and it is much appreciated. It can be challenging, let's say that, because not everybody is clean in how they leave those facilities and that makes it hard for people who are cleaning them up. Secondly, if we are talking about the state of our highways, I want to just begin by noting that the Yukon is second only to Saskatchewan in the amount of road per person that we have here in Canada, so a lot of road. The highways crews do, overall, a really outstanding job. This spring, there was this huge challenge with the Klondike floods and they got pulled in to do that work to try to deal with the floods on those roads, and I think that set them back against what would be their normal maintenance schedule on the north Klondike Highway. It was a bit of an anomaly year, given that.

Now, for Tourism and Culture, how do we work with Highways and Public Works? Of course, we stay in touch with them. The main way that we feed information to them is through our visitor information centres. It's a two-way street, our visitor information centres. That's where visitors, and sometimes Yukoners, come in and talk about concerns that they have. We relay that information to Highways and Public Works so that they are aware. But I'm sure that Highways and Public Works is getting lots of calls from Yukoners as well. Second of all, we relay information to visitors about the conditions of the roads, so it works in both directions.

One of the interesting things that the department let me know is that, while we are well on our way to recovery, we are not quite to 2019 levels for tourism and visitors yet in terms of the number of people who are coming, but the post-COVID visitors are travelling differently. One of the ways in which they are travelling differently is that they are more digital and more online, and they are coming less often to our visitor information centres. So, it's not that the numbers of visitors to the Yukon are down; it's that they don't use our visitor information centres as often. We will look for other ways in which to get information to travellers. For example, Highways and Public Works uses some of their information signs. We will continue

to look for ways to try to make sure that the feedback loop is working in both of those directions.

Ms. Van Bibber: It wasn't just the highway going north; it was also the Alaska Highway that was in pretty rough shape, too, and there was no flooding over there.

Going back to the information centres, they are a wealth of information for visitors, but they also, as you say, gather information. I know that, during our briefing, I asked whether some of this was retrieved. They said that a lot of it was repetitive so it wasn't really of much value. Is there some program that could possibly track actual major concerns, such as that there is a good stop or bad signage or about road conditions? Perhaps problems could be addressed much more quickly instead of waiting until the end of the season.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: We do use our visitor information centres to gather information. We have a report that we produce annually about the performance of the visitor information centres. We ask a lot of questions and do exit surveys and things like that, but we are really not hearing a lot of criticism raised about our roads.

It's not that there isn't some of that, but it certainly isn't anything that is overwhelming. We also ask them about their experience at the visitor information centres just to understand whether they are enjoying it and getting the information that they want. It is 80-plus percent who say that their experience is excellent; just over 15 percent rate their experience as good; two percent rate their experience as average; and close to zero percent rate it as poor or terrible. It's actually pretty darn good.

Because there is this trend where people are moving to more digital ways, we are starting to also look at expanding that access. For example, we had a digital kiosk this year in Skagway where we could provide information for visitors who are interested in coming to the Yukon or are coming to the Yukon. There could be ways through that where we gather and aggregate information as well, but we are just starting to move down that path.

The answer is, yes, we do gather information at our visitor information centres, but the information about those specific concerns are not what we have been hearing at the VICs.

Ms. Van Bibber: Thank you to the minister for that answer.

There was a decrease of about \$200,000 in the supplementary through the Historic Sites branch for the new border signs. Apparently, that is being deferred to next year. Can the minister tell us what the reason was for those not being completed this year, and will that be budgeted for next year?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The answer to the second question is yes. Are we planning to do this next year? Yes.

There are sort of two reasons why we pushed it out a little bit further. The first one is that we put a lot of focus on other 125th anniversary things that were happening.

The Yukon 125 funding program, which I mentioned in my opening remarks, where we had community events and things like that, and then we also have the 125 prize where we have now seen these great two-minute videos that are out there now over the next little while for Yukoners to look at. We will have a selection committee make decisions on them. There were a

couple of other things that we were doing, so we were starting to run out of time.

The other reason was because we wanted more time. The design of the signs, its overall layout, is done. What we are looking for is how to engage with communities, especially our border communities, because there is a way to customize them or add some, let's say, art or design to the signs. We need to do that work with communities. We didn't have enough time to do that so we will take that time now. We just moved it to next year in terms of our timing.

Ms. Van Bibber: On that same idea of visual, "Welcome to the Yukon" border signs, we also have the amazing tourism banners that are up in most towns and villages as we come along the highway, even around Whitehorse. Some of them are in pretty rough shape. Are those going to be renewed? Is it an annual thing? Are there new artists? Are they replaced on request or do you just get what you get?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I don't know that they are replaced annually but I do know that they are replaced over time. My deputy minister is just letting me know that there will be a new set coming this spring and she has seen the new artwork. I have not, so as soon as I get done here, I'll find a way to go check out that new artwork. They get replaced every couple of years. I will check in with the department. Sometimes they are damaged by wind and things like that, and if they are, whether we can replace those on an interim basis. But I can say that we should expect new banners coming this spring.

Ms. Van Bibber: I don't know who is responsible for the flags. There was an article in the paper the other day about the border flags and that our Canadian area was looking pretty awful. Who is responsible for replacing flags at our borders?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The responsibility of those flags in those areas is the Canada Border Services Agency. We have reached out to them to try to recommend that they keep the flags in — I have a British phrase in my head — good nick. They should be well kept. They are our national symbol.

Ms. Van Bibber: My colleague is whispering "Junction 37" in my ear — so also flags along the other entrances into Yukon.

Can the minister tell me what the overall budget for the Yukon 125 project or program is with the signage and all of the things that went with that?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: We will follow up about the flags in the Town of Watson Lake. Are we thinking of the ones right in town and that series? No, they are further on. I will follow up with the MLA and figure out which one it is, and we will try to follow up.

With respect to the Yukon 125th anniversary initiatives, the total budget, I believe, is \$460,000. Of that, \$400,000 went to projects across the territory. We engaged with the Yukon Historical and Museums Association to do that work for us, and we gave them a small transfer payment agreement to carry out that work of \$60,000. I would really like to thank them for their work. When I have gone to the events, I have seen them there doing things like passing out the buttons, postcards, and things like that. I know that they work very closely with all of the projects. I have heard their representative on the radio, once or

twice over the summer, talking about the projects. I think that they have done a really great job.

Ms. Van Bibber: Along those same lines, the airport is an amazing entry into Yukon. I was just wondering if there was any thought of renewing the signage or videos in that area, again with Yukon 125 in mind.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The responsibility within the airport is Highways and Public Works, but we work with them to provide material. For example, we are working with them to provide them with renewed, or new digital images and video, and things like that. Tourism and Culture always keeps a library of materials that we use to help promote the Yukon, so we share that. I just will acknowledge that, when we update the signs around the territory, we will also be updating signage that is there, outside of the airport, or just outside the airport, at the same time.

Ms. Van Bibber: The talk about our new input into Skagway and building a dock, and we haven't really talked about the Skagway cruise market much lately. I do know that Holland America is back in Yukon and active as can be. So, the Skagway cruise market — does the department do much advertising and endeavour to get them to visit Yukon?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The basic answer is yes, we are working very collaboratively with Skagway; I will give several examples. Before I do, let me just back up to the Whitehorse Erik Nielsen International Airport. You know, I was talking about one of those digital kiosks that we put down in Skagway. Well, it turns out that we put one up in the Whitehorse airport just last week. I haven't seen it yet, but I just found out, so Yukoners can get a sense of what we are talking about today. The digital kiosk that we put in Skagway is at the White Pass Building. A lot of travellers pass through there; it's a good spot for it, and thanks to White Pass for working with us on that.

We ran a "tourism connects" day, where we actually took the folks from our VIC and Carcross, sort of tourism operators, and we went down to Skagway and did a day of engaging with them to exchange what is happening with the Skagway operators and what is happening with our operators. We have a specific \$50,000 joint marketing partnership with Holland America. So, there are ways in which we are working with Skagway and the cruise ship industry.

I should note that the August border crossings this year, 2023, were now back up above 2019's border crossings. That is one of those areas where we have rebounded now, so that is good news. Again, we are working with the folks in Skagway directly.

Ms. Van Bibber: I am going to switch to work that is being done on the Dawson City Museum. Phase 2 was to have been completed this summer, and then immediately moving into phase 3. Can the minister give an update on this particular project, and is it on time?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The Dawson City Museum, where we held our one-day Special Sitting this summer, has been getting renovations, but the building is operated and managed by Highways and Public Works, so the renovation work that is happening is with Highways and Public Works; so, I would have to defer to my colleague to get that information.

Ms. Van Bibber: Thank you, that's good to know. In the spring budget, there was an allocation of \$50,000 each for three artists under the creative and cultural career advancement fund. Can you let the House know what the response from the artist community was? Is this a fund that is going to be repeated?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Yes, we have had a really strong response from our creative industry folks and our cultural practitioners. Yes, the intention is to repeat the award. The feedback was very positive on it.

Ms. Van Bibber: There is also something I hadn't heard of before that I was reading, and it's called the "Yukon sustainable tourism dashboard." This was supposed to be launched in the spring of 2023 and was used to update information to measure and monitor tourism in the Yukon. Has this dashboard been launched? If so, has anything been discovered in the new data?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The Yukon sustainable tourism framework is very close, and we will have our first report out shortly — this fall is what we are anticipating. Part of that will be the dashboard.

I think something else worth mentioning is that we have become a member of the United Nations International Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories. We are only the second place in Canada to do so, and that will also be reported on.

I have seen drafts of the report. I know that they are just working on finalizing things, so it shouldn't be too much longer before that comes out.

Ms. Van Bibber: Could the minister tell me what information they are actually gathering? The dashboard launches something — and also, how much is the cost of this particular endeavour?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Deputy Chair, I was just trying to peruse through the draft report, just to try to get a feel of some of things that will be in the dashboard. So, there will be a measure of 17 elements of tourism, and they will range from resource management, governance, economy, environment, people and culture, but if we are trying to drill down to specific things — some of them include, for example, greenhouse gas emissions and solid waste, things like that, but it will also include many of the metrics of tourism, like numbers of visitors, length of stay, et cetera.

The member opposite asked about the cost. It is just built into the ongoing workplan of the department. It is just a way of reporting back differently and looking at sustainability as a lens. You will recall, Deputy Chair, that under the *Yukon Tourism Development Strategy*, sustainability was one of the main pillars of that. It has been in the planning stages for quite a while, so there is no new cost that we are anticipating. It is just a lens that we are using to communicate back out with the public, or operators, for that matter.

Anyway, that is sort of a rough idea and, as I say, we are anticipating having that report out this year, later this calendar year, and I think that people will get a feel for it once they see it.

Ms. Van Bibber: I know that, in the tourism marketing industry, you are always planning years out, trying to figure out where the next wave of visitors is going to come from, and we

do that nationally, as well as locally, with our tourism associations.

Can the minister tell us if there are any new markets being considered? We know that, with the visit with Japan and India, it was noted that the Minister of Tourism and Culture went to talk about tourism initiatives that could work with Yukon, so could he also tell us a little bit about what he felt about the trip and drawing this particular market?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: First of all, the trip that we made was to Japan. We didn't go on with the Premier to India. The portion of the trip that the deputy minister and I were focusing on was Japan. While we were there, we met with a half dozen tourism operators. We met with Destination Canada. We signed a letter of intent with Hankyu Travel and Maple Fun Tours. Hankyu is one of Japan's largest tourism operators.

By the way, after we got back to Canada — not long after that, we met with Hankyu and Maple Fun here in Whitehorse, as they brought one of their first tours to do an aurora flight, partnering with Air North. We met the Japanese travellers who were on that trip. It was very exciting.

We do see that there is potentially an opportunity with the Japanese market. I think that it is not isolated, though, just to Japan. For example, just a week or two ago, I met with the Consul General from Korea. We discussed the potential of the Yukon as a tourism destination. I think that the other market we have seen emerging — and I think I have said it in the Assembly before — is Mexico. In particular, with interline agreements between Air North and Aeromexico, we have seen an increase in visitors from Mexico so that becomes another focus for us.

I think that one of the things we are looking at, in terms of travellers, is not just where they are from, but where and when, because it matters whether people want to come in the summer, on the shoulders, or in the winter. So, part of how we think about developing the Yukon and promoting the Yukon includes that notion of timing, because the more we can help our operators to have a revenue stream throughout different parts of the year, then the better off they are going to be as well.

Ms. Van Bibber: You pretty well answered my next question, which was that we know that the Japanese come for our winter tourism, so we are encouraging them to try to come for year-round attractions. Is there a planned return trip to Japan to firm up some of these letters of intent?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: We have someone in Japan right now. First of all, we have some staff from Tourism and Culture who are responsible for different markets, and they do lots of work back and forth with those markets. We also have — they are called “general sales agents” or “in-market sales contractors”, who we work with in various jurisdictions or various other countries, you know, ranging from the US, Canada, Japan, Mexico, many European countries. There are ways in which we keep a presence at all times.

I think it's important to note that, in our experience in meeting with the folks in Japan, they do love the northern lights. They see it as really a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for them to get a chance to see northern lights. I think they think of it as quite spiritual. They were very keen to talk to us about First Nation culture and how they engage with it when they're here.

They are also pretty keen on the midnight sun, the mountains, and getting out into the outdoors where there aren't a lot of people, because it's pretty crowded with people where we were — in Tokyo, anyway. So, I think they loved that aspect of the Yukon, too.

Again, all I will say is that we look all around, trying to expand the seasons and promote travellers to come to the Yukon from a range of areas, and, yes, we are doing follow-up with Japan.

Ms. Van Bibber: Thanks to the minister for that answer. Going on to service industry jobs, as we know, it really hasn't rebounded since COVID hit us; especially, the work in the tourism service industry is really difficult for many employers, and I am often asked, where do all these workers go?

So, has there been any research done on what happened to so many of our front-line workers who seem to have moved away from our industry since the pandemic? I know that the department is trying to encourage different programs to help employers, but has there been any research, or reports, undertaken to study this problem?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Yes, there is analysis being done. I think that we can start off by sort of acknowledging that, coming out of COVID, tourism was one of the last sectors to start to repopulate and get back up on its feet. Meanwhile, we had a labour crunch coming. There are all sorts of reasons.

During Question Period today, I think that we had some of that dialogue, just about our aging workforce and people retiring, and suddenly, there was very, very low unemployment. As a result, if you were in the tourism industry as a sector, you know, there were other jobs, and I think that some people did migrate to other jobs.

Have we been doing analysis? Sure, and not just us. The deputy minister was recently at the federal-provincial-territorial tourism meetings. They were in St. John's, Newfoundland, last week. I got up — because they are four and a half hours different, I was up pretty early. There was one day that I was up at 4:30 a.m. or 5:00 a.m. to get on some of those calls to participate. But one of the things that happened was that Destination Canada is doing work, along with some other agencies, to try to identify the details on a subsector-by-subsector basis around tourism — food, beverage, accommodation, et cetera.

Here within the Yukon, our own Tourism Industry Association of the Yukon has set up a recruitment and retention task force. They have a report that is available online right now, I think. They have been working with our Department of Economic Development and the labour market on this. With us as well but, in particular, with Economic Development dealing with the labour questions.

Ms. Van Bibber: Yes, the labour shortage is certainly being felt throughout Yukon, especially in Dawson City where, as far as I could see, there were many “help wanted” signs and they were closing earlier. It was very difficult to get a meal some evenings. Part of the problem with the communities and seasonal workers, of course, is housing and accommodation.

The project with the Klondike Visitors Association and — with some help from others on the Village off King project.

This was to put up 20 wall tents, washrooms, and a cook shack between King and York streets. How did the Department of Tourism and Culture help with this project and did it actually begin this summer?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Yes, we did help out. I think we gave over \$200,000, maybe \$230,000, to the project. We were trying to facilitate the project to come in. For example, it turns out that there was a bylaw or something that was a challenge within the City of Dawson so we met with city council and the city manager. We talked to them about it and tried to assist them in navigating through that. I think there might have also been an order-in-council that we needed to do in order to help them to do that. There were some steps. We worked to facilitate it. It was sort of piloted this year with the intention to get it up and running very early next year, but the pilot was a success. One of the differences, I think — and it is worth noting — is that, in the past when there was a tent city in Dawson, it was really individual workers who were staying there and doing their thing, and then it became challenging for the city now and then because of noise and other issues. In this instance, in the Village off King, the seasonal housing project, what we are doing is working with the employers. They are the people who have the wall tents that then go to their staff, so there is a responsibility back that those staff have that accommodation through their work, even though it's co-located together. We think that this is going to make it more successful overall and thus more sustainable over time. The project, we are looking forward to it next year and we have been supportive throughout.

Ms. Van Bibber: That's very interesting. If it's employer-assisted, are they renting a tent for their employees, or do they own the tent? How does the system work that you just described?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The employers rent the tents from the Klondike Visitors Association. What they choose to do or how they deal with that with respect to their employees might be very different. It might be that they provide that as part of their employment or maybe there is a rent back. What then happens is that — well, it's twofold. First of all, if that employee decides to move on from their employment, that space then goes back into the pool for other potential employees, so it's really about making sure that it is housing for labour. The second thing is that there is a responsibility to make sure that the other sort of noise bylaws and issues around Dawson City are upheld because you are there with the support of your employer. Those are the two ways in which we think it's going to be successful, and the early indications from the project this year were positive.

Ms. Van Bibber: That is very interesting — for an employer to rent a tent. Are these tents electrified? Are they brought up to a certain code? Is there a manager on-site who would be monitoring — sort of like a campground where you would have somebody on-site who would assist people should they need it?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: First of all, as part of the whole project, the Klondike Visitors Association is managing the site. I don't know whether that means there is someone on-site all of

the time, but there is someone who is responsible to make sure that things are happening and going well.

Everything is to code — let's make that clear, to begin with — but I don't know that it means there is electricity running into each tent. There is a central washhouse and things like that, and, of course, there would be power there. I would have to check in with the Klondike Visitors Association to know what kind of amenities there are within each individual wall tent, but it is meant to be seasonal housing. It is rustic and Yukon, so I am just not sure of exactly everything that is in there, but I think probably most of us have stayed in a wall tent, so I am thinking that it is pretty standard.

Ms. Van Bibber: I look forward to seeing how it eventually evolves within that community.

I know that with the evacuations due to the flooding and the wildfire further down the line, many of the businesses in that area were impacted, and especially the hotels. Does the Government of Yukon — or Tourism, in particular — keep track of how many people use the hotels? Was there communication to tourist and tour groups regarding the situation? How was this information given to the tour groups? Because they would have to cancel, reschedule, and cause a whole domino effect down the line. If the minister could give me a bit of an update on what the communication was like with various groups?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Just moving back for a second, what I will offer to do for the member opposite — next summer when we have the seasonal Village off King Street up and running again, I will reach out to the Klondike Visitors Association and get an opportunity for her, when she's in Dawson, to have a tour of the village so she can see it, and I will go check it out too. I will just make that offer.

Second of all, how do we get information to visitors? I have already mentioned one of the ways that we talk to them is through our visitor information centres. If we have alerts and updates, we are passing them out there.

There are sort of standard and stock ways happening. For example, 511 is something that is maintained by Highways and Public Works at all times. Tourism operators are using it pretty often, so they are talking to their clients.

We also have the Emergency Measures Organization. If there is some sort of closure, evacuation, or alert or something, those are put out broadly. Then there is often conversation, for example, with the Tourism Industry Association of the Yukon, and the Klondike Visitors Association is one of their members — that's just for Dawson, but we could talk about any region of the territory — and then they talk to their operators. We are always there to answer specific questions if they arise. What do we do about X? Then we reach back into the departments, but those are sort of the pathways that are there.

The other thing worth noting is that even when we had evacuations — Old Crow and Mayo evacuated this year — according to the data that we got from the hotels in Dawson, they were still full during those times.

There are issues, and we do have conversations ongoing. In our last quarterly meeting with the Tourism Industry Association of the Yukon, we talked about emergencies, how

we can plan for these things, in consideration of both — how they would impact our tourism sector, but how the tourism sector could support the Yukon during those times, so a two-way conversation, but that is just in its initial stages.

I think we recognize, for example, our wildfire season, which was significant here this year, was nothing like the Northwest Territories' or even British Columbia's. So, we recognize that there is an impact. We are looking to have deeper dialogue with the Tourism Industry Association of the Yukon about that over time.

Ms. Van Bibber: Thank you for that answer, and for the invite to the tent city in Dawson.

I think the last exit survey held in the Yukon was in 2017-18, so I'm sure we are due for another. Can the minister tell us when the next exit survey will happen, or are we on hold due to the pandemic years?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: They are out there doing the survey right now. I think they are up at the airport. The deputy minister saw them up at the airport. Now, the survey will take place this fall; we will get a report next fall; so, it takes some time. Not to take away from all of the other metrics that we try to use to get a sense of where we are with tourism, but we do have a new exit survey happening right now.

Ms. Van Bibber: I always found those very interesting, and I appreciate the length of time they do take.

Deputy Chair, I am going to end on a note of congratulations to Air North on their new venture of opening the restaurant at the airport. I couldn't think of a better company and a more wonderful addition to that specific space. It has been long overdue. On that note, I will pass it over.

Deputy Chair: Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Deputy Chair: Committee of the Whole will recess for 15 minutes.

Recess

Deputy Chair: Committee of the Whole will now come to order.

The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 54, Department of Tourism and Culture, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Is there any further general debate?

Ms. White: I thank my colleague for her questions today and, of course, welcome the officials into the Assembly.

I am just going to start off general debate here by saying that I have lived in staff accommodation all over the world, and wall tents sound pretty luxurious to me, in some of the places that I have stayed. Knowing that the Klondike Visitors Association really wants there to be staff and employees, I am sure that the wall tents they have put together are glorious, and, in some cases, you can see wall tents on short-term rentals for upward of \$300 a night. So, this is quite luxurious to be able to stay in a place like that. So, I do appreciate that they have looked outside the box in trying to find staff accommodation, because we know that is one real challenge in the Klondike.

Speaking of the Klondike, I note that the minister visited with KIAC earlier this year, and indicated that there may be additional funding this fall, looking toward art funding. I wanted to know if there is going to be additional funding for that organization. The Klondike Institute of Art and — I just drew a blank, and I am terrified of getting the acronym wrong. KIAC, I am just going to say KIAC for now.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Ms. White: It is the Klondike Institute of Art and Culture; thank you. Just a big pause there.

You know, they had core funding for a long time — \$425,000 a year, and there was COVID financing of \$25,000 a year. The minister made that permanent, which is great, and then there was a percentage increase that brought it up to \$459,000 a year, and that is a good way of closing the gap, but for the community of Dawson City, that organization is a lifeline. It is really important, especially in the long winter months — the events that they put on. So, I just wanted to know if that organization could expect an increase to their funding?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Yes, let me begin by echoing the Member for Takhini-Kopper King's remarks that the Klondike Institute of Art and Culture, KIAC — the society behind it is called the Dawson City Arts Society, DCAS — they are an important group. I think they are our second highest funded group under arts in the Yukon — just acknowledging that importance.

We have made the increases permanent. We were not considering, inside of this budget, increasing arts funding, but we have been working with KIAC on other avenues to try to support them or their financial initiatives. I know I'm blanking on the name of the artist residence that they use, but that lot and the building on it is owned by Parks Canada. I think Parks Canada is considering whether to divest themselves of that, so we have been exploring potential options. I just wrote back to them — I don't know — a week or so ago, talking about that ongoing dialogue. You know, we are watching how Parks Canada is working with that property right now. That's the way in which we are trying to support the society: How to assist them in other ways to either be able to increase revenue or to decrease their costs. I will just give a shout-out to them for all the work they do.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that. I know that the Dawson City Arts Society did send a letter to the minister in February indicating that they are looking for an increase. It was \$425,000, and now it's \$450,000 plus the percentage increase to get to \$459,000, but what they are looking for is core funding of \$500,000. Again, this is an organization that does a lot of good in that community, and it does a lot of work.

I just wanted to know if, toward the budgeting year next year, is the minister looking toward that increase?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: We will be entering into the budget exercise this fall to get toward next spring. I don't have any information to share today. I just looked up the name of the house. It's called the Macaulay House. That's the one that we have been working with them on.

I appreciate that, when I met with KIAC, they talked to me about the importance of the funding, and I agreed with them

and have been working with them to find other avenues to try to improve their financial situation.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that. Fingers crossed that they get to see at least that gap closed.

The 2022-23 tourism industry report identified timely access to class 4 driver's licences as being an issue for tourism operators. I just wanted to know if the minister could provide us with an update, and to let us know whether or not that issue has been resolved.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: When I rose to speak earlier, I mentioned that we just recently had a quarterly meeting with the Tourism Industry Association of the Yukon, TIAY, and this was one of our topics that we have been discussing. TIAY has been working with Highways and Public Works and has been getting an expedited process for the class 4s. I don't want to say that the problem is solved; I would say that it is being improved and we have talked about further improvements that we could work on. We also had some conversation at our last meeting about timing. There are seasons when a lot of workers are coming in and they all need that class 4 at the same time, so that's one issue. Then there is also the issue that you get those high points but, if there is any staff turnover, you have to have the ability to try to get someone back into the system. So, TIAY spoke about the working arrangement with Highways and Public Works. I know that the Deputy Minister of Tourism and Culture has also been speaking directly with the Deputy Minister of Highways and Public Works on this issue.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that, and that is a lovely example of removing the silos, or the walls between departments, when we are looking at trying to help one where it's across departments, so I do really appreciate that.

Another issue that they identified was with carrier compliance and weigh-scale reporting regulations and their potential effects on the tourism operators. I know that they sent a joint letter to both you and the Minister of Highways and Public Works. I am just hoping that the minister can let us know how these concerns are being addressed.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: It will be a similar response to my previous response. Again, on this issue, I know that TIAY is working directly with Highways and Public Works. I know that the issue that they are addressing, the weigh-scale permit redesign, — is not unique to the tourism sector but it is important to the tourism sector. We understand that they are working it through, and we have just asked that we be kept apprised of it. The Deputy Minister of Tourism and Culture has also been in contact with the Deputy Minister of Highways and Public Works to make sure that we are supportive of that dialogue happening between the industry association and the Department of Highways and Public Works.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that.

Earlier in the Sitting — I am actually not sure if we had the conversation here or if I was having a conversation with my friend from Skagway who let me know that the last cruise ship was originally timed for tomorrow, October 25. Can the minister let me know if that is the last cruise ship and if they are going to be going into Carcross?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The answer is yes. We are anticipating that the last cruise ship is tomorrow. Yes, we are anticipating that there is a bus coming to Carcross. We actually kept the visitor information centre open an extra 11 days, not just for tomorrow on the last day, but for the last week and a half of cruise ship bus travel to Carcross. We had some challenges with the washroom. We have had ongoing challenges with the washroom there and we actually installed some porta-potties to try to support, which aren't the best solution but they are a solution.

We are watching to try to see what that extra traffic means. We are monitoring what kinds of traffic we are getting through Carcross. So, VICs are open longer. The folks at Carcross Commons have been staying open longer to accommodate the last cruise ship. My wife happened to be down with her cousin from England who stopped in the Assembly last week. They went down to Skagway last week and she also let me know that the cruise ships are finishing tomorrow.

Ms. White: I think that this is an example of an industry that continues to kind of astound at different times. My previous colleague in the Assembly, actually in the same seat — well, different seat and different title as well. But the Member for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes back in the day, Kevin Barr, was the one who advocated for it being open earlier — the Art House bathrooms, because we were seeing the cruise ships starting to come earlier and now we are seeing them later.

A funny anecdotal story, because not everyone is used to outhouses. I was there riding my bike a couple of weeks ago and the absolute look of horror on the faces of the people as they tried to navigate their way into the outhouse was actually quite humorous. I think for some people who have never seen porta-potties, it is really not as self-explanatory as that. I appreciate that it is a way that we need to bridge it, but we might have to look at signage to explain what exactly it is and how one goes about it, because it wasn't until I came out of the porta-potty that they looked a bit more confident about going into the thing.

As we think about tourists visiting us from other locations and knowing that what might be normal for us is not normal for them, we may have to look at a way of gently explaining what those are. But I do appreciate that they were there. I just can't imagine a cruise into Alaska at the end of October, so I think that is really something else.

Deputy Chair, I am sure that there are a lot more questions that I could be asking, but I actually think that, for now, I am going to stop. I thank the minister for the time and his officials for being here. I look forward to signage on those outhouses next year to help explain the process. With that, I will sit down.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I just want to note that our first question today started with outhouses, and our last question — well, maybe not our last question, but the most recent question today ended with outhouses.

We have tried to open the Art House early and we have had success now and then, but we have also had frozen pipes burst water and there are all the challenges of water delivery in Carcross. We have tried to open them later, as well, and we have had similar problems, so it is an ongoing challenge. I do

note that there is one sign on those outhouses. It is the sort of droopy dog with the clothes peg on the nose. It was a start to infographics.

Anyway, I thank the member opposite for her suggestions.

Deputy Chair: Is there any further general debate on Vote 54, Department of Tourism and Culture?

Seeing none, we will proceed to line-by-line.

Ms. Van Bibber: Deputy Chair, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 54, Department of Tourism and Culture, cleared or carried, as required.

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 54, Department of Tourism and Culture, cleared or carried

Deputy Chair: The Member for Porter Creek North has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, requested the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 54, Department of Tourism and Culture, cleared or carried, as required.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Deputy Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures

Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of \$804,000 agreed to

On Capital Expenditures

Total Capital Expenditures underexpenditure in the amount of \$200,000 agreed to

Total Expenditures in the amount of \$604,000 agreed to Department of Tourism and Culture agreed to

Deputy Chair: The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 2, Executive Council Office, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Deputy Chair: Committee of the Whole will recess for 15 minutes.

Recess

Deputy Chair: Committee of the Whole will now come to order.

The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 2, Executive Council Office, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Executive Council Office

Deputy Chair: Is there any general debate?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Deputy Chair, I am pleased to introduce the supplementary estimates for the Executive Council Office today for 2023-24

I would like to thank the officials for being here today and supporting me. We have our deputy minister, Justin Ferbey, as well as our assistant deputy minister, Kate Durand, with us today.

The Executive Council Office provides guidance and leadership across the Government of Yukon and directly supports the Cabinet Office. Through its day-to-day activities, the department supports the Cabinet decision-making process by ensuring that government policy and planning are coordinated and effective.

Demonstrating strategic corporate leadership, the department builds respectful and enduring relationships with other governments. As well, the Executive Council Office takes the lead role in promoting the effective and timely communication of information to the public.

Here is a brief overview of the items in our supplementary budget for 2023-24. The Government of Yukon is committed to reconciliation and building strong relationships with First Nation and Indigenous peoples. Much of our work is led by the Aboriginal Relations division. Through consultation and policy support, fostering relationships, and negotiating and implementing agreements, the division aims to achieve environmental, social and economic benefits for all Yukoners.

The 2023-24 supplementary budget includes a net increase of \$1.35 million to support the work of the Aboriginal Relations division. This includes just over \$1 million to meet legal obligations and commitments to reconciliation with First Nation governments, including capacity funding for consultation and engagement, bilateral negotiations, and meeting final and self-government agreement obligations. This also covers a one-time transfer of \$330,000 to the Council of Yukon First Nations for their 50th anniversary of *Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow*. This funding, carried over from last year, supported the Council of Yukon First Nations in organizing anniversary celebrations and developing a commemorative book.

Also, under the Yukon Employees' Union collective agreement increases, in June 2023, the Yukon Employees' Union ratified a new collective agreement that will apply to over 3,500 employees. This agreement will be in effect until December 31, 2024. The 2023-24 supplementary budget includes an increase of \$609,000 for department union staff resulting from the new agreement. We value the work of our Yukon public service and are pleased to have these changes in place.

Lastly, we have some adjustments resulting from the ongoing COVID-19 activities. In 2020, with support from the Government of Canada, we announced \$1 million in funding for the COVID-19 recovery research project. Through the department's office of the science advisor, we supported 10 research teams conducting projects that examined the direct and indirect impacts of the pandemic. These projects examined themes such as First Nation emergency response, women's livelihoods, the health and well-being of Yukon educators, housing, recreation, and more. The budget for this research program was split evenly over two fiscal years.

Due to unforeseeable circumstances, not all of the funding was spent in those fiscal years, and the Government of Canada allowed the balance of \$189,000 to continue into 2023-24 to complete the project. The recovery research project concluded this past June with a public summit where researchers shared

the results of their work and discussed how to apply the learning to programs and decisions.

The research outcomes will support the territory's recovery from the direct and indirect impacts of the pandemic and will help the Government of Yukon, the Government of Canada, and Yukon First Nation governments, and other sectors plan for future health-related emergencies. This funding is 100-percent recoverable from the Government of Canada, and any unspent funds will be returned.

I look forward to answering any questions that the members may have about the 2023-24 supplementary budget for the Executive Council Office.

Mr. Dixon: I appreciate the opportunity to ask the Premier some questions about the department of the Executive Council Office. We learned in the briefing a little bit about the role that ECO and IGR played in the Premier's trip to India, and I would like to just follow up on some questions that we have on that. Can I ask the Premier: Whose idea, or where did the idea come from to go to India? Was it something that was generated by IGR, or did it come from the Department of Economic Development, or another department like Health and Social Services, to visit India as a part of this trip?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I think this has been a topic that has been the focus for the member opposite over the last while. First of all, there are a number of invites that we constantly get, and usually, it's from consul generals, sometimes it's from high commissioners or ambassadors, where they see an opportunity for the Yukon to do that work, or to look at opportunities.

Going into this last year, I think, probably, first and foremost, our focus was invites that came from the Philippines, and over the last year, we have tried to take on those invites, and we have tried to plan some work trips around that, but it has been difficult with that particular file because we had a federal election, a national election in the Philippines last year, in the first quarter of the calendar year. We had been working on a memorandum of understanding with the Philippines from March of the previous year. So, we were in a position where we really were trying to ensure that there was an opportunity to travel there.

That was one of the locations that we were looking at, so we know, what are some of the reasons? Well, with the Philippines specifically — the Philippines has been primarily the number-one location for individuals who are applying to our nominee program, or using the nominee program with employers, and that has been pretty consistent over the last number of years. The other country of origin that has also been a key area has been India. The Philippines and India have been sort of number one and number two, going back and forth, when it comes to the nominee program.

What is important is that we know the pressures that we have under housing, and we understand that we have to be very strategic when it comes to our ability to use our nominee program and to support opportunities for these individuals to become — they inevitably become Yukoners — but also, in many cases, we want families to support other family members to come over. So, if we have people from the Philippines, or they are coming from India, it is quite important, because they

then can come to the Yukon, and in some cases, they are very well-supported by family members. It also, in many cases, gives them an initial place to live.

First of all, I think that it is really important to highlight the fact that there is a diaspora, both from the Philippines and India, that is pretty significant here in the Yukon.

When it came to looking at some of our goals and objectives, I was pretty clear in my statements, upon taking this job, that I wanted to support a number of departments and ministers in their work. The three areas that I really wanted to focus on were housing, which is the reason I kept the housing portfolio; the next was education; and the other one was health.

We are not in a position to look internationally, when it comes to educators, even though there is pressure across Canada, but when it comes to health and human resources, and the work that we are doing, we are looking for different jurisdictions to find, specifically, nurses. What we are hearing and being educated about, from the Philippines, is that there was an area where a lot of provinces and territories were focusing on, but we are hearing now from the Philippines that they are having their own challenges with capacity; whereas with India, it is a bit of a different conversation. There has been an interest, across the country, from a number of provincial leaders. I know that Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, British Columbia, and Saskatchewan do a lot of trade in India, but primarily, it would be those other provinces that are looking to go there.

The Department of Health and Social Services has been working on an agreement with the University of New Brunswick, and that has been a focus of partnering with the university, and then also looking at some recruitment methods with India.

When it comes to critical minerals and mining, I think our initial meeting with officials from India was, I believe, in 2018. I can go back and check. And I know there was a discussion, and there is at least one local company that I have reflected on that has done work in India. They have some individuals who moved from India and now live in Whitehorse who work for them, at least, one of the lead individuals in their business. In many cases, we had officials say that there could be more opportunity around these areas.

When we think about investment attraction, we are seeing a tremendous amount of investment from Canada, as well, going into India. We see Alberta, which I believe now has full-time representatives in India. We see Saskatchewan has opened, I think, either one or maybe multiple offices in India. We are hearing, as well, from colleagues that this is an area that we should be looking at.

Japan is another one, which was part of that same trip, where there is a bit of history of looking at going to Japan from the Yukon government. It has previously been, I believe, a focus on tourism, but now we are seeing at least two Japanese companies that have made investments in the Yukon — one that has been here for quite a while and another that has been doing some due diligence on another project. Again, we are seeing those opportunities.

In both cases, you know — look, I think that we get information, and we talk about where there are opportunities for international investment, partnership — those types of things — and departments will come and say that this is a place that might be an opportunity. IGR and Economic Development — or Economic Development and — or, sorry, Executive Council Office really has helped to facilitate some of the things that, as Premier, I have wanted to do. I guess what it comes down to is — I will just put on the record that, as a Premier and minister, inevitably, if the question is: Who made a decision to go on this trip? That's me who has made the decision, if that's what we're trying to get at. I see all of the information; I read my briefings; I inevitably have to make a decision based on this information, and I made a decision, and I stand by that decision. So, if that is the line of questioning we want to get into, I am excited to get into that. We will leave it to the Leader of the Official Opposition to carry on.

Mr. Dixon: I appreciate that. That was all very interesting, but my question was simply whose idea was it to go to India? The Premier, at the end of his speaking, just said that departments will often come to ECO and suggest going to a location for various reasons. So, did any department recommend that the Premier go to India? Did Economic Development recommend it? Did Health and Social Services recommend it? Who recommended that the Premier go to India?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I think, over the last number of years, probably more in my work with Economic Development, I have had discussions with officials when we have talked about different places for opportunity, that said, hey, this is location that may work.

Again, if this question is — I think, at the end of the day, when the member opposite went to China, when the member opposite went to Hong Kong, when the member opposite made all those different trips, and went out — I can share a quote right now about those decisions. Inevitably, the member opposite made that decision. I would hope that the member opposite would stand by it.

Look, I understand it's trying to turn into this line of questioning — if there's something that is believed that was done wrong, then, please, let's get into it. Inevitably, this decision is my decision at the end of the day — my decision. Again, we have lots of information that is provided to us. There are a number of different places, within dialogue, where we identify opportunities to look at investment attraction. I could go through another four or five right now. At the end of the day, this decision falls on me. Who, at the end of the day, says, yes, we should do this? That's me.

Mr. Dixon: I appreciate the opportunity to respond to that. The reason I am asking is simply that we have heard from a variety of people that the reason why this trade mission was undertaken was it was specifically chosen by the Premier himself. The Premier referenced my trip to Japan and Hong Kong from 10 years ago or so. That was an initiative of the Department of Economic Development. They came to me with a proposal. As the Premier has done in this particular case, I

accepted that proposal and ended up going, based on the advice of the department.

I was just curious if the Department of Health and Social Services actually identified India as a place that the Premier ought to go, because I don't believe that to be the case.

I will move on, and I will ask the Premier then about the total cost of the trip. Can he give us a sense of the total cost of the trip? He told us in the Economic Development debate that there were 18 individuals who attended — five from the private sector, two ministers, and the remainder were public servants.

Do we have a total sense of the cost of this trip?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: The total cost of the trip right now — and I say right now, because I want to make sure of all of the numbers, and if there is anything outstanding — is \$170,899.54.

Mr. Dixon: Does that include the funding that was provided to the non-governmental folks who attended the trip as well?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: That also includes the advance, which was questioned the other day. We had two officials — one official plus another individual who went along. I do apologize. To that second question, I think it was about other individuals who might have been there. Sorry, I just want to get the question one more time, and I will do my best to answer.

Mr. Dixon: The Premier listed a number there, and I asked him if included in that number was the amount provided to non-government attendees of this trip.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: No, I think that the number is five business organizations that used their existing agreements with the Department of Economic Development. I am more than comfortable to come back and provide that number as well. What we are looking at, again, is \$170,899.54, which includes officials going. It also includes, again, the entire group and the early advance.

Mr. Dixon: I appreciate the Premier's clarity on that. I guess that, when we return to Economic Development, we can inquire further about the amount of funding that came from Economic Development.

I will follow up on the question about the advance trip, because what the Premier just said is new to what we heard, both at the briefing and previously in Economic Development. Previously, we have been told that there was only one individual who attended the advance trip to India. Can the Premier clarify if there were two people who attended, and if so, who were they? Did they work for IGR or for Economic Development? Who were these folks?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I hope that's not new. We had one individual who travelled from Intergovernmental who also went to the Philippines, because, at that point, we were trying to see if there was going to be that opportunity. So, one was from IGR, and one was a cultural liaison, an individual who does work for the Yukon government and speaks fluent Malayalam and travelled just for the India portion of the trip in southern India to help make some of the connections with some of the different health care groups and investment groups.

I will note that, since we are talking dollars, I thought \$170,000, when we think about the cost of some of the health

care challenges we have — when I went back and reviewed, the member opposite — I think that it was about \$100,000 spent in a year on international travel by the Leader of the Official Opposition. I think that \$170,000 for us, collectively, is a pretty good return on the investment.

Mr. Dixon: Again, my question was about the people who went on the advance team. So, if I am understanding this correctly, an official from IGR travelled as a part of the advance team to India, and if that is correct, I would just like some clarification. Also, what was the date of that trip — the advance trip?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Yes, one of the individuals in Intergovernmental travelled to Japan, the Philippines, and India to do an advance trip, which we think is a prudent thing to do. For the India portion, there was one individual who works for the Yukon government who was asked to go to help liaise. Part of the Indo-Canadian community here, which is primarily from Kerala — the member opposite attended an event, as well as me, this year, their Onam event — so, that organization supports a group of people from Kerala. There was an individual from that community who helped as a liaison and with logistics, the individual who was there from Intergovernmental.

I can go through the total — the trip timing was from July 21 to August 5. That was the prior mission, officials' level — doing some of the groundwork for September. This trip included Tokyo, Thiruvananthapuram, New Delhi, Manila, and the Philippines, because, of course, as I said, it was an area that we had originally planned to go.

Mr. Dixon: Deputy Chair, I appreciate the information from the Premier. I would like to turn now to the subject of the lack of communication from the federal government to the Yukon government about the ongoing diplomatic issues between the two countries. The Premier has spoken publicly on national television about his disappointment with the federal government for not providing more information about what was going on, and expressed that he raised this concern with ministers in Ottawa. I think he noted that at least one minister apologized for what happened, but I would like to just clarify.

Did the Yukon government never receive any information from the Government of Canada that would lead them to believe that the timing that they chose for the trip to India was not the best timing, and that there was a low likelihood of success between the Yukon government and the people on the other end of the trip, given the fact that we were in the midst of an otherwise engaging diplomatic incident? So, ultimately, my question is about the lack of communication: Can the Premier just simply confirm that the Government of Canada never communicated to the Government of Yukon anything about any sort of concerns that they might have with the Yukon government attending a trip in India?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: On the first question, that is correct, and I think on the latter part of the question, which was around — that would lead to your success — it's important to — it's one thing for us to politically debate. I think it's important, though — and what I have shared — is to ensure that the current situation doesn't also lead for Indo-Canadians to feel

uncomfortable in this territory — in this country — and what is really the state of this situation.

From a government-to-government standpoint, we all know clearly that there is a tremendous amount of pressure around this situation, and we can dig into that, and we can talk about how this country is a country of rule of law, and if somebody sends something they shouldn't, that's absolutely inappropriate and needs to be dealt with. But I think, over the last couple of weeks, there have been a lot of individuals who have felt that, because of the comments and some rhetoric that has gone on — not here in the House; I'm not saying that, but just in general, there is a lack of comfort, because of what has happened, and there is a tremendous amount of government-to-government stress right now, but when it comes to community-to-community, in many ways, that continues on as it did before September.

We have the biggest pension funds in this country that have invested greatly into India. When you think about the Canadian CPP pension, or you think about Ontario Teachers', or you think about OMERS — all of these different organizations are going to continue to do business — provinces like Saskatchewan, who do a tremendous amount of their trade, will continue on, and there will be success in all of those things.

I met with officials from Health and Social Services today, and we talked about all of this ongoing work that is happening, which they are going to be focused on, which is making sure that we continue to build on the success that we saw there.

I think the biggest pressure will be what happens with visas. We all know that. Some people have existing visas, and they will travel back and forth. We sat with Air Canada in India. They are continuing to look at expansion to do more. They will have to work through the pressures that are in place right now.

We are getting information coming back where people still want to look at opportunities, in many cases, in hospitality. They want to be able to come to the Yukon and work in the hospitality field — whether it is in hotels or restaurants. That's something I think, even probably from our last line of questioning today, that continues to be an area that we want to support.

I think this will go back and forth. I look at the information that was provided to us right from April, and then through to the subsequent time. I look at the conversation that happened internationally, where leaving from Japan and going to India, where we saw vocally out there, that there was a stall in trade, but that's because this is a trade conversation that has been going on for a decade. Folks wanted to go back — as it was characterized in the media — and consult with business, and it was a pause.

All of these things that were said — we were getting the same information. We ended up with all the data we had, and the briefings we had, whether it was from Global Affairs, the conversations with Global Affairs, or even being — which I won't get into deeper detail — but even having security officials meet with our officials, all the while ensuring that people were safe and that we were taking care of good business on behalf of Yukoners.

That has been our experience, and, yes, I have spoken publicly. I feel that we should have had as much information to make great decisions on behalf of our team. I have said publicly I understand that the conversation that I was privy to at 12:00 at night on a news cycle, I would have liked to have known before. I did say publicly, and I will say again, I can understand where, something of that nature, we may not get a phone call until later. I feel there could have been more outreach during our last hours there. I do.

I do, and I chaired the western premiers meeting last week, and I brought to the table, with my counterparts, the fact that I think that we need to collectively — and I will wait to see from my colleagues — you have Premier Moe, Premier Smith, Premier Eby — who spoke publicly about his discomfort with information at a subnational level — and others who were there. It was Premier Kinew's first meeting. I said that we have to look at — I believe it's the *CSIS Act*, and the *CSIS Act* needs to be amended. We have to see — that act has to be amended. I have spoken to the Senator for the Yukon on this topic, that it has to be changed so that leaders at a subnational level have the ability to get the information that they need, so you are not put in this position. I know we might get into this dialogue back and forth, trying to get an "I gotcha", but the reality is that, if anything, we took all of the information we had, and we had really good meetings.

I think it's important, because this is something that can positively affect, specifically the Yukon health care, for decades to come. This is an opportunity for us to get extremely talented individuals to come here. So, no, it wasn't — we saw success in our bilateral meetings in all of the areas where we had them.

The member opposite is correct — I believe there should have been a better flow of information. Right until the Monday morning — you know, our first meeting after we left south India, when we were in New Delhi, we had a meeting in the morning, and we met with the High Commissioner. The term that was used was "things coming out of the G20 were frosty" — that's it — and go and have your meetings, and you will likely have good meetings, because you are subnational government, and there is lots of interest in working with Canadian provinces and territories.

Mr. Dixon: In speaking to the total cost spent on the trip, the Premier said he thought that this was a good return on investment. What is the return? How should Yukoners look at this trip and judge its return? How many new health care professionals have we received from this trip? What is the return that Yukoners receive for this investment, to use the Premier's term?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: That is a very good question. When I said it, I got ahead of myself. What I have to state is that I believe that \$170,000 — and then we will come back with the other additional opportunities — money that we spent supporting the business sector to travel. I know right now — you have heard individuals from the business sector who were on that trip speak publicly about how they think there is value, and there is a trade mission that is coming up between Canada and Japan. I know that there are folks who want to be on that

because they see opportunity. I think that we are facilitating that. There are no elected officials on that trade mission over here in the House.

When I think about where we are at, we are under this pressure, especially with agency nurses. I think that the member opposite will appropriately question me in the spring on this one, and over the next number of months — whenever there is an opportunity to question it. We know that we have an obligation to take the relationships that we built and bring value. I agree with that. I will just say this in the House: That will be our goal and focus. I think that we can continue to report back on the value that we think is created. We can debate if that's value, but I think it is, first and foremost, the health care professionals. We are probably going to need a few months now to get things in place. We have to see what is going to happen with visas back and forth for individuals.

Today, we spoke about how one of the organizations has representation in North America. It's about them working closely with the Department of Health and Social Services. Some folks will be coming over to do some bridging work academically outside of here. We will hopefully have the opportunity to facilitate some of that here in the Yukon. Then we will be able to see those folks come into the pipeline of health care professionals.

I want to be able to reach out as well, and hopefully, we will have that success with people getting visas, specifically over the next 24 months, when it comes to supporting our hospitality and tourism industry, because folks are highly trained, and I think that we can bring some folks back. I will come back. I asked Health and Social Services before we went, and I will sit with our officials and say, what does an agency nurse cost the Yukon? If we had people who moved and made the Yukon their home, what would that look like, if you had two or three people who are Yukoners, are union members, have moved here, so we're offsetting that extra cost? I will come back, and we can do it in Question Period or another time. I know that we have kind of run those numbers.

When you start looking at this, you probably have a small number of nurses who you have gone out and been able to recruit, and then you offset that cost. You will see some good return on the investment, but I think that it is bigger than that. I do. I think that, on the tech side, there seems to be a lot of interest on the IT side to look at ways to collaborate. On the film side, there were multiple organizations that want to come, work with our film people, and spend money here.

Can we get to a place where, over the next while, we are \$170,000 into an expenditure or something where I believe that we are going to see a return on our investment? Yes, I do.

I think we are going to have to watch as some of our business people, such as SPYA, which had all the meetings with the film sector, to see if they are going to be able to attract investment. But also, even from the standpoint of people not travelling — post-production costs are 35 cents on the dollar for some of our companies. They can shoot here and hire people, but then when they go to post-production, they can have post-production done essentially there in a partnership and they can stretch their money much further, especially here where we

don't have that same breadth of post-production but we still want to see the above-the-line opportunities in the film industry.

Those are some of the pieces. I think it's important to illustrate that today. We start to track what opportunities come and certainly look forward to those conversations again with the Leader of the Official Opposition over the next while.

Mr. Dixon: I will move on.

I have a question related to the Yukon Forum. Earlier this year — just a few weeks ago, following the meeting in Dawson — there was a press release put out by the Yukon government and it included quotes by the Premier and two chiefs. One of the quotes was from the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Chief, and a number of folks from the mining industry raised this with us as a point of concern. I think that some folks in the industry found the quote from the chief a bit unsettling with regard to some of the comments that were made about the need to stop or pause all exploration and staking, period. That was raised with us as a concern — that this sort of language would show up in a Yukon government press release.

Perhaps the Premier could respond to that and just address the concerns that have been brought to us by the folks in the industry around quotes like that appearing in a Yukon government press release and concerns that have been raised, and what folks in the industry should think about those kinds of comments — if the Premier can offer some reassurances about the future of the industry.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I think that we should still have an opportunity to go out and explore the industry and to look at being able to find new areas to do exploration. That would be the same sentiment from the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources. I continue to commit to supporting our industry.

Concerning that quote, these are all independent governments and it was put out — the comments. There were lots of comments that were made as well in the press conference — not that I would agree with all of the comments that were made, and probably the individuals who were at the table would not agree with all the comments that I made.

Getting down to it, I would never speak on behalf of Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, but I think, reflecting on comments from the Leader of the Official Opposition, the member opposite — that is a comment. Those statements and feelings are very alive, and that is probably not the only First Nation leader whom you would hear it from. You are asking me: What do I think that we should tell the industry? I think that the industry, depending on where you are working, you need to engage with those First Nation leaders and understand exactly what their perspective is, and also share with them what that means to your work, your industry, and your contribution to that community and to this economy.

Yesterday, I spoke with members from industry in the afternoon and said that we all have a role. Going back to those community leaders and talking about what you think about those statements is an appropriate, professional course of communication. I also think that it is important for individuals, as I stated yesterday. We have talked a lot about Skagway here and I said that it is really important. It is not just Yukon

government, but it is leaders in that industry who are spending time in Skagway and meeting with officials to help them understand what that infrastructure means there.

As the member opposite knows, they are independent governments sitting at the table. I have had the Grand Chief — I spoke with him this week and there were lots of challenging conversations that occur in a Yukon Forum.

There were lots of challenging conversations that occurred at that Yukon Forum but, at the same time, I had the Grand Chief say in a dialogue with me on Friday — I think he actually said it on air. He said that it was probably the best Yukon Forum — that he felt — because you are in a position where you are digging into — there is enough of a trust at the table to have disagreements and hear them back and forth, but also understand that we all have different constituencies and roles to play and work to do and that we're not going to always be in line, but there is enough respect to be able to have that discussion where, going back in time, it just didn't happen. People did not walk into the room together, they wouldn't meet, or, when they did, people would leave or cut it short. I think that you have to be into those real conversations. The other key is that, when you are doing it, you have to ensure that you keep the level of respect. You will respect what the other person is saying — the other level of government — and you have to, and there are reasons why, of course, they are getting to where they are in their perspective. That was reflected in the government of Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in's comments. Our comments in that press release were reflective of our view as a government within those comments.

Seeing the time, I move that you report progress.

Deputy Chair: It has been moved by the Member for Porter Creek South that the Chair report progress.

Motion agreed to

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I move that the Speaker do now resume the Chair.

Deputy Chair: It has been moved by the Member for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes that the Speaker do now resume the Chair.

Motion agreed to

Speaker resumes the Chair

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

May the House have a report from the Deputy Chair of Committee of the Whole?

Chair's report

MLA Tredger: Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*, and directed me to report progress.

Speaker: You have heard the report from the Deputy Chair of Committee of the Whole.

Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I move that the House do now adjourn.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Government House Leader that the House do now adjourn.

Motion agreed to

Speaker: This House now stands adjourned until 1:00 p.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 5:27 p.m.

The following sessional papers were tabled October 24, 2023:

35-1-116

Yukon Hospitals Year in Review 2022-2023 and Yukon Hospital Corporation Consolidated Financial Statements March 31, 2023 (McPhee)

35-1-117

First Report of the Members' Services Board (October 24, 2023) (Clarke, N.)

The following legislative returns were tabled October 24, 2023:

35-1-103

Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Ms. White related to general debate on Vote 10, Public Service Commission, in Bill No. 211, *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24* — COVID-19 leave (Silver)

35-1-104

Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Ms. Clarke related to general debate on Vote 10, Public Service Commission, in Bill No. 211, *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24* — *Interview and Relocation Expense Directive* (Silver)